



IMIA Position Statement on National Certification for Medical Interpreters

Introduction

The International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) is the only [trade association](#) representing medical interpreters in the US and abroad, with over 2,000 members. In addition to developing the first [Code of Ethics](#) and [Standards of Practice](#) for the profession, it also established the first [national annual conference on medical interpreting](#) and the first [National CEU Program](#) specifically for medical interpreters. The IMIA has been working on developing a certification program for medical interpreters since its inception in 1986. It made a decision in early 2009 to create a separate organization solely charged to oversee national certification. The IMIA is proud of founding an independent non profit 501c3 organization, named [National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters](#), (National Board, also known as NBCMI) which launched the first National Certification Program for medical interpreters, also referred to as health care interpreters, on October 10, 2009.

National Recognition

Most professions are not recognized by the public as a professional body until it asserts who is qualified to practice and who isn't. While most assessments vary in quality, scientifically valid exams are in a completely different category: they are legally defensible. See the letters from the [HHS Office of Minority Health](#) and [The Joint Commission](#).

Multi-Organizational Collaborative Model

After many IMIA initiated calls since 2003 to continue the previous collaboration with CHIA and NCIHC on our second pilot, to work on a third pilot to develop national consensus, it was clear that not all organizations were willing to share leadership, or agreed on the urgency of certification. After endless genuine but unfruitful negotiations, in January 2009 the IMIA decided it needed to honor the call from members who couldn't wait any longer. LLS accepted the call for collaboration and both organizations embarked on working with PSI, a national testing company, to develop new certification exams. While LLS was a leader and co-founder with the IMIA, we believe that the National Board will commission other organizations with experience in national interpreter testing, to develop other exams for the process. We are proud of our leadership in this collaboration and the vital work and developments that have since come to fruition.

Our multi-exam, multi-credential model is now being followed by other organizations.

Certification by Interpreters for Interpreters

Medical interpreters are the professionals undergoing certification. They are the ultimate experts in medical certification. Many language access advocates feared that professionalizing medical interpreting would diminish the pool of available interpreters. Interpreter Administrators also feared that this would drive interpreter costs up. As you can see, for the reasons above, some were and still are against certification. The IMIA always held the position that patients have a

right to a credentialed language professional, just as any other health care professional for their own patient safety.

The IMIA is the only national trade association in the US officially representing medical interpreters before many authorities, including the International Federation of Translators (FIT), a federation of translator and interpreter associations worldwide. The national certification program of the National Board was developed in a public way, by interpreters and for interpreters. Every specific public call allowed interpreters to participate in the process, including the governance process. The exams were developed based on a national job analysis responded by interpreters, and not based on any vendor service package.

We surely would not have gotten so far with our reimbursement advocacy efforts if we didn't have national certification already in place.

Timely Connection with National Health Care Reform

IMIA understood the urgency of national certification within the framework of the ongoing national dialogue on national health reform which started back in 2008. We are certain that had we not continued our work, we simply would not have had national certification available to interpreters in 2009. Our national advocacy work for reimbursement has been strong and a national credential delineates clearly what qualified services should be reimbursed.

IMIA's Role as an Umbrella Organization for the Profession

Multiple state and national certifications are a very possible outcome in a democratic and pluralistic society and common in other professions. The IMIA is committed to act as a clearing house of information. Therefore, the IMIA promotes all standards of practice, all codes of ethics, and not only its own publications. Likewise, the IMIA does not withhold sharing information and opportunities to its members or other authorities regarding future certification options for interpreters.

Currently, the National Board is the only certification entity that offers a national medical interpreters certification in the US. It is no longer accurate to say that there is no national medical interpreter certification in the US.

Scientifically Valid and Credible

Scientifically valid and credible certification programs need to be developed by [professional psychometricians](#) to be recognized for accreditation by the National Commission of Certifying Agencies (NCCA). While the IMIA and LLS helped with funding and resources, it was PSI that developed the exams utilized by the National Board. The [NCCA Standards](#) cover governance and other characteristics necessary for national accreditation. The National Board believes it abides by NCCA Standards, and worked to ensure this by hiring a consulting company called [SeaCrest](#). The NCCA is a division of [the Institute of Credentialing Excellence](#), which is not allowed to give advice to future applicants of its process. The National Board will apply for accreditation as soon as the program has 500 certificants or CMIs projected for the end of 2010. The National Board now counts with the [final validation report](#) from PSI, the national testing company which developed the written and oral exams.

Funding Framework for National Board

The IMIA has received very little funding specifically tailored for certification. It has received the following donations specifically for medical certification: \$10,000 from a Medical Foundation in California, \$30,000 from the Office of Minority Health for the IMIA 2003 pilot, and a donation of \$4,000 given by The Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation. All other costs have been covered by IMIA interpreters through their interpreter membership fees to the organization. Therefore it can be said that interpreters directly funded the National Board certification program. The IMIA is not able to quantify how much it has invested in human and financial resources to the development of national certification since 1986 as a total. We can state that just since 2006, we estimate over \$150,000 has been invested. LLS invested its own resources and in PSI for the development of the oral exams. The National Board set the cost of both National Board exams. The Funding Model for the operation of the National Board is simple. The National Board receives all the registration and exam fees. As a public charity, 501c3, it will also apply for grants.

Completely Neutral, Inclusive and Public Process

The National Board certification is not only vendor neutral (since we collaborate with all for profits who come forward without exclusions or limitations), but are also funder neutral (as they are not unduly influenced by any funders goals or aspirations). The IMIA also believes that both non profits and for profits can work together to solve complex national projects that benefit the public by ensuring patient safety for language minority patients. The National Board has complete control of their program and no organization can influence the National Board on its decisions related to national certification. The National Board is fair to all and completely void of bias. All National Board Directors have signed a Strict Conflict of Interest Document.

The National Board has also operated from inception as a public process. In order to form a truly public organization, the selection of those to govern the entity must be public, from the bottom up, and not secretly selected, from a small group of self selected people in the industry. The public call for an independent Selection Committee guaranteed an inclusive process to all in the US and also ensured that the Board Members were selected without bias or favoritism. This is of utmost importance in a program that is truly inclusive and transparent.

Relationship of IMIA & the National Board

The IMIA is one of two founders of the National Board, along with LLS. What this means is that the IMIA made a decision to form a separate legal organization that would become the Certifying Body for the test and focus on governance and oversight of national certification, educating the public about the importance of certification (hence the 501c3 status of public charity). The IMIA and the National Board are completely separate entities.

Independence of the National Board

The National Board stands on its own feet and is an independent non-profit, where founder-representative National Directors have no majority votes on the board and where the IMIA and LLS cannot interfere or influence the decisions of the National Board. Without this independence in governance it would not pass the NCCA Accreditation Standard listed above. While it is easy to speak of words of *inclusiveness, neutrality, validity* etc, it is the actions, not the words that are important proof of our foundations and we are proud that we also practice what is preached. These actions and processes mentioned above (open calls, independent selection committee, public selection etc.) are needed to create a truly credible and inclusive organization to result in a truly valid program.

Conclusion

The IMIA is proud of the undeniable leadership role in working endless hours since 1986 to establish a national-consensus by many that national certification was needed and possible in 2009. The IMIA believes in the importance of making its position and views on national certification clear and unambiguous to the general public so as to avoid any misinformation. We believe this statement covers the most important points necessary for complete transparency with our members. We hope that other certification programs follow this best practice for those constituents that might have similar questions.