



INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL
INTERPRETERS ASSOCIATION
Leading the advancement of professional interpreters

December 17, 2009

Dear National Directors

As one of the founders of this organization, I take this opportunity to address you with great pride. First of all I want to congratulate each one of you for your courage, talents, and obvious commitment to the advancement of the profession and patient safety through national medical interpreter certification. Your appointment through an independent and highly qualified selection committee testifies to your qualification to oversee this process at a national level. I couldn't be more pleased with the diversity of this board, in terms of geographic distribution stakeholder groups represented. It is important that the governance structure follow the NCCA accreditation requirements closely as it is essential for the credibility of the program. This required a public member who utilizes the services to be certified, and we have this by having Dr. Eric Hardt, a physician who relies on medical interpreters every day.

I believe that this is an opportune time to give you the vision that Lou and I have shared for you even before the National Board was created. There are several values and beliefs that have guided our work to this point. We believe:

- 1) national certification is direly needed to ensure patient safety.
- 2) we can get further ahead if industry leaders worked together towards a single comprehensive certification program
- 3) there is a certain urgency to implementing national certification due to national healthcare reform.
- 4) medical interpreters are still in danger of being left behind as the bill does not speak of professional medical interpreters but of interpreting as a task, not as a regulated profession.
- 5) that standards for interpreter education were not necessary before certification but rather that it is national certification that will become the new benchmark for interpreter education programs to work towards.
- 6) all the previous work towards certification and national testing should be recognized and incorporated into a single certification.
- 7) no one previous organization should lead the field, as no one standard or code should supersede others. Our work has always believed in true collaboration recognizing ALL organizations and achievements.
- 8) professional interpreter interests have to be ensured and therefore trade association endorsement is essential.
- 9) In order to ensure inclusion to all interpreters, we need to provide a robust credentialing program that covers all languages and dialects
- 10) in order to ensure that all languages and dialects are covered, we should enlist other testing organizations to join the National Board
- 11) replication and duplication of efforts, resources, and funds is not an efficient policy to tackle language access disparities or national interpreter certification.

We believe these values are genuine and transcend differences of opinion or parallel efforts. After a concerted effort to call for collaboration, unity, and multi-organizational solutions with other organizations, we realized that IMIA and LLS were willing to coalesce and form the National Board to carry out that mission as a new independent entity. Now that you are here doing this hard work, our position shifts from leading national certification to becoming your supporters as you lead this new program. Likewise I ask that you support Nelva Lee, your new Chair and the four that are now the Executive Committee, a group that has volunteered to steer this group and who are doing a great job.

This is a unique program

- 1) that has a completely public open process at each step of its organizational development
- 2) utilized a renowned national testing company, PSI with over 600 testing sites in the US
- 3) is by and for interpreters, endorsed by the largest employer and association of medical interpreters, representing over 10,000 interpreters
- 4) is the only one in place at a national level
- 5) is following all legal, ethical and governance requirements to achieve NCCA Accreditation

As a new oversight body, you will engender great authority. With that comes much responsibility. I believe this National Board should own this authority and responsibility and not be afraid to inform the interpreting community of official positions on all issues related to how national certification will be further formulated and how certification ensures patient safety. If you follow the principles of inclusion, equality, and transparency, you will be able to easily justify your decisions and opinions.

Do not fall into the trap of thinking that you have to do all the work. Your job as a governing board is to govern, to prioritize tasks, and make the important decisions of *who* needs to do *what* and by *when*. There are many individuals and organizations that if invited will volunteer for this program, so spend your time wisely by discerning who needs to do what in the next 3 years.

There are also important national organizations that need to be tapped again. You cannot develop the National Board qualification exams and the National Board screening process alone. Your charge is to oversee the development, not develop programs, so you need to find organizations that have the resources, structure, and experience to develop these programs, as IMIA and LLS developed with PSI the written and oral exams respectfully. This board should seek the active participation of other organizations, non profit and for profits with experience in national interpreting testing. The only other organizations we know that have this experience are Cyracom, Pacific Interpreters, and the University of Arizona. Bringing other organizations to participate will strengthen this program so soon all languages can be covered. Consider contacting all 3! Since the University of Arizona already does Simultaneous interpreter testing they could certainly develop the next advanced certification level, for example. Acknowledging these organizations' contributions is reflective of our inclusive values.

In all of this, do not forget about the medical interpreter. The reason we moved forward was because we don't want to see medical interpreting recognized primarily as an activity and not a profession. We need significant numbers of certified medical interpreters, so that only those that are proven to be competent are reimbursed. Without limiting reimbursement to credentialed interpreters we won't be able to protect the profession as it could remain optional for many years to come or services below minimal standards could be reimbursed, desensitizing the need for certification.

Put together an Advisory Board to fight for unity – a group of experts made of individuals in the field who can advise and assist you in the work ahead and unity. Consider also contacting the same CCHI Advisors who could become instrumental in helping with our call for unity. We are a group that wishes not to politicize certification.

As I phase out my involvement with the daily activities of this group to focus on promoting national certification in DC and ensuring that the registration process is further developed, I will still be here to help and support your work in whatever way is possible. We respect your autonomy and while I will be tempted to advise much, advice is just advice, it can be adopted or not. We will always back you up no matter what happens, and while there will be imperfections along the way we will keep moving forward with our mission of ensuring patient safety through national medical interpreter certification.

Sincerely,



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