



INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL INTERPRETERS ASSOCIATION

Leading the advancement of professional interpreters

MINORITY LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS TO RECEIVE FREE MEMBERSHIP TO ORGANIZATION: IMIA continues support for professionalization of medical interpreters

Boston, MA – When Marlene Obermeyer, a registered nurse from the Philippines, was called to interpret for a Filipino patient one evening, she was told that the patient spoke Tagalog, the official Philippine language. However, Obermeyer discovered that the patient only spoke a few words of Tagalog. The patient spoke Cebuano, a Philippine dialect, one that Obermeyer does not speak. Every day, doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers struggle to communicate with their patients who do not speak English very well. “Working with trained medical interpreters who speak indigenous or local dialects is critical in ensuring safe and quality patient care,” says Obermeyer, who is now the Minority Languages Division Chairperson of the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA).

Training and job opportunities for interpreters in these languages are not readily available, creating a shortage in qualified interpreters in many languages and dialects. There is also a shortage of assignments to keep these interpreters in the market long term. The IMIA Executive Board has voted to provide free one year memberships to minority language interpreters who want to become involved in the professionalization of medical interpreters. Minority languages, also called languages of lesser diffusion (in the US), are those languages for which there are not many speakers in the local country but for which there are language access needs for services. There is also the limited availability of interpreters for those languages, and for training, hiring opportunities and testing for validating their skills. The IMIA is strongly committed to increasing the supply of and opportunities to interpreters of diverse languages, by supporting these interpreters who need to network in order to remain in the field.

By joining the IMIA, these interpreters join an international registry of medical interpreters who can be searched by state, or language, increasing their chances of work. “These interpreters have a hard time finding work, and employers have a hard time finding them. Our job as an association is to create the mechanisms for them to find each other,” stated Izabel Souza Arocha, IMIA Executive Director.

Based on the 2010 Census, the top 10 languages spoken in the US are: English, Spanish, Chinese languages (Cantonese and Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, and Russian. An Interpreter who speaks a language or dialect not on the list is considered a minority language interpreter.

To apply for the free membership, minority language interpreters are invited to complete the application form at the IMIA website, at <http://www.imiaweb.org/members/application.asp> and put the code ‘Minority Language 1 yr’ in the “Additional payment notes” section at the bottom of the form. Information about the Minority Language Division can be found at http://www.imiaweb.org/divisions/minority_languages.asp.

About the International Medical Interpreters Association:

The International Medical Interpreters Association is a US-based international organization committed to the advancement of professional medical interpreters as the best practice to equitable language access to health care for linguistically diverse patients. Founded in 1986, with over 2,000 members, most providing interpreting services in over 70 languages, the IMIA is the oldest and largest medical interpreter association in the country. While representing medical interpreters as the experts in medical interpreting, membership to the IMIA is open to those interested in medical interpreting and language access. We currently have a division of providers, corporate members, and trainers. Policy makers, health care administrators, and others interested in medical interpreting are also welcome to join us as associate members. The IMIA is recognized as the standard-setting organization for the profession of medical interpreters.