

# TIPS ON WORKING WITH A LANGUAGE INTERPRETER



In today's cross-cultural society, and diversity in the general population expected to grow in future years, you may experience an increasing need for language interpreters to help create an optimal experience for you and your limited English proficient speaking patients. We hope you find the following tips to be helpful in your interactions with language interpreters:

## Assessing which type of interpreter services to use\*

- Telephone interpreter services are easily accessed and available for short conversations or unusual language requests.
- Face-to-face interpreter services provide the best communication for sensitive, legal, or lengthy communications.
- Trained bilingual staff provides consistent patient interactions for a large number of patients.
- Minors and family members who patients wish to use as interpreters are discouraged for reliable, accurate patient communication.



## Working with an interpreter\*

- Acknowledge the interpreter as a communications professional.
- Briefly introduce yourself to the interpreter (name and nature of the call or visit), and describe the type of information you are planning to talk about with your patient.
- Give the interpreter the opportunity to introduce himself or herself to the patient.
- Recognize the interpreter is the medium, not the source, of the message and that he or she is not responsible for what the patient says or doesn't say.



## The interpreter session\*

- Allow enough time for the interpretation session.
- Speak in the first person directly to (or facing) your patient, instead of speaking to the interpreter.
- Speak clearly, at an even pace, and pause occasionally to ask the interpreter if he or she understands the information you are providing and the questions you are asking.
- Remember, you do not need to speak especially slowly. This actually makes a competent interpreter's job more difficult.
- Avoid interrupting during interpretation. In some languages, it may take longer to explain a word or a concept.
- Read body language in the cultural context. Watch the patient's eyes, facial expressions, and body language. Look for signs of comprehension, confusion, agreement, or disagreement.

Once you have identified your patient's preferred language, it may be helpful to document the language on paper or in electronic medical records. Posting colored stickers on the patient's chart to flag when an interpreter is needed (e.g., orange for Spanish, yellow for Vietnamese, green for Russian) may also be helpful for easy reference.

### New Mexico and California laws

New Mexico and California state laws require health plans to provide language assistance program services to eligible health plan enrollees with limited English proficiency. For more details on these services, please access your state-specific reference guide(s) at [CignaforHCP.com](http://CignaforHCP.com) > Resources > Reference Guides > Medical Reference Guides > Health Care Professional Reference Guides. You must be a registered user to access this site. If you are not registered for the website, click on "Register Now" to enroll. If you prefer to receive a paper copy or CD-ROM, call **877.581.8912**.

### Interpreters Save Lives video

You may find it helpful to view *Interpreters Save Lives*, a public service announcement available on our cultural competency training and resources website.



**Offered by: Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company or their affiliates.**

\* Adapted from Industry Collaboration Effort (ICE) Tips for Working with Interpreters.

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