

# Ten top tips for Clinicians, when working with Interpreters

- 1** Make sure the interpreter has **enough information** about the proposed conversation prior to the appointment to have had a chance to check on terminology. This is best done when the interpreter is first requested.
- 2** If possible you should hold a short conversation with the interpreter before you meet the patient to make certain they understand you. There are many different accents and speech styles, and everybody thinks that they speak clearly, but not everybody is right. It's a case of **"tuning in"**.
- 3** Make sure you look at, and address your patient directly, **using "I" and "you"**. Your interpreter will maintain these forms of address and will only use the third person to signal a need to clarify something: e.g. "the interpreter needs to stop, because...."
- 4** Make sure the **interpreter can see** everybody's face (where this is practicable) **and** that he or she can **hear properly**. Excessive background noise makes the job especially difficult.
- 5** Interpreters take **notes** while listening, to ensure total recall when relaying messages. These are confidential and **should be left with the clinician**.

- 6** If the interpreter is delivering simultaneous whispered interpreting<sup>1</sup>, try to **leave a short catch-up pause** after every couple of sentences.
- 7** If the interpreter is delivering consecutive interpreting<sup>2</sup>, **finish the thought** before you stop to allow the relay.
- 8** Please make a point of **allowing the interpreter to complete the interpretation** of each speech by the patient. The vital information or a key phrase may be at the end.
- 9** Please remember that **the interpreter's role** is specialist and specific to relaying meaning across language and culture. They are not there to replace other staff members e.g. chaperone, accompanying patient to X-ray/toilet.
- 10** Please be aware that however professional your interpreter is, there may have been elements of the interaction that they found upsetting. Since both of you have a duty to confidentiality, **a short debrief with you** would, in some circumstances, be very helpful.

<sup>1</sup> Simultaneous interpreting is when the interpreter is listening, changing the language and speaking (whispering) all at once.

<sup>2</sup> Consecutive interpreting is when the interpreter listens and makes notes while one party speaks and then passes the message on in the other language, before the other party replies.

Further information on working with interpreters can be found in the booklet 'Interpreting for the Public Services' available free of charge from the Regional Language Network North West.

## Where to go next

National Register of Public Service Interpreters  
[www.iol.org.uk/nrpsi](http://www.iol.org.uk/nrpsi)

Institute of Linguists. The Institute serves the interests of professional linguists throughout the world and acts as a respected language assessment and accredited awarding body.  
[www.iol.org.uk](http://www.iol.org.uk)

Institute of Translation and Interpreting. Independent professional association of practising translators and interpreters in the UK.  
[www.iti.org.uk](http://www.iti.org.uk)

BLIS Professionals. Database of international communication experts.  
[www.blis.org.uk/professionals](http://www.blis.org.uk/professionals)

Code of Practice for interpreters  
Please read the Code of Practice for interpreters at [www.nrpsi.org.uk](http://www.nrpsi.org.uk) for further information.

Regional Language Network North West  
To order copies of Interpreting for the Public Services visit the publications pages on our website or contact us via e-mail or telephone.

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**This tent card has been designed to give tips/guidance to health service staff when communicating with patients through an interpreter.**

It is not a definitive guide and is meant as a quick reference only.

For more detailed help and advice contact the RLN NW.

The Regional Language Network North West promotes a greater regional capability in language and culture skills for business and employment.

The RLN NW website is a gateway to many useful resources relating to language and culture.

BLIS Services serves as a single reference point for anyone looking to use or provide services in language and cultural expertise and includes:

**BLIS Professionals**

A quality assured database of translators, interpreters, cultural consultants and language trainers

**BLIS Jobs**

The job site for people with languages

**BLIS Facilities**

Providers of support services

**BLIS Courses**

A portal to learndirect

**All BLIS Services are free and on-line.**

[www.rln-northwest.com/blis](http://www.rln-northwest.com/blis)