



Guidelines for Working with Medical Interpreters

Pre-appointment:

1. Identify the appropriate language

Refugees come from countries where several languages or dialects are spoken. Before scheduling the interpreter, it is always best to double check the client's preferred language. For example, refugees from Burma may speak Burmese, Karen, Karenni, or Chin. Ethnic minorities, like the Karen and Chin, may not speak Burmese nor feel comfortable with Burmese interpreters.

Note: Building Bridges staff will coordinate the scheduling and payment of interpreters at the PCC. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Eva Baker at 817-735-0316

2. Establish rapport with the interpreter

Introduce yourself, discuss eye contact, etiquette, and cultural background of the client to establish rapport with the interpreter

3. Explain the purpose of the appointment

It is recommended to meet with the interpreter a few minutes before the appointment to explain the procedure and to discuss any information that may be helpful for the interpreter to know beforehand, such as what a pap test is.

During Appointment:

1. Start the appointment by making a commitment to confidentiality

It is important that refugee patients are assured of confidentiality. Patients may be hesitant to discuss their medical details with someone from their community. Maintaining confidentiality is one of the characteristics of a competent interpreter.

2. Introduce yourself and allow interpreters to introduce themselves to the client

Begin the appointment by clearly stating your name and the purpose of the visit including procedures you will be performing in the visit.

3. Speak slowly and clearly using short sentences

Pausing frequently (almost after every sentence) will allow interpreters to effectively deliver the message to the clients.

4. Address and ask questions directly to the patient, not to the interpreter

5. Use both words and gestures

6. Make sure you speak in a clear, normal tone, and not too fast

People tend to raise their voice when speaking to people with limited English proficiency. Avoid speaking loudly and try not to speak fast, allowing enough time for interpreters to process the message.

7. Use simple language; avoid jargon and technical terms

Remember that trained medical interpreters **are not** medical professionals. It may be best to explain what is involved in the procedure when there is a more complex term being used.

8. Allow time to repeat yourself in different words if the message is not understood

Patients, as well as interpreters, might interrupt you or ask you to clarify something they didn't quite get. Be prepared to explain words or concept that they might not be familiar with. Also, be sure to ask the interpreter if she understands what you are saying.

Post Appointment

1. Have a quick debriefing with the interpreter

Meet with the interpreter again after the visit to go over how it went – things that were comprehensible and/or concepts that weren't easily understandable, if the interpreter had any questions or concerns, etc. Interpreters may have time to clarify cultural details that they didn't say in front of the patient. This helps build relationship with the interpreter and helps providers identify things that need more clarification in the future.