

# Why use certified, qualified interpreters and other trained language professionals?

## COST

- Certified, qualified, and trained interpreters make significantly fewer critical errors than untrained interpreters<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> and increase satisfaction both for patients and providers<sup>4, 5</sup>, thus minimizing unnecessary return visits and costly mistakes.
- When qualified interpreters are not used at admission or discharge, the length of inpatient care for LEP individuals has been shown to increase significantly, as well as the rate of re-admissions within 30 days of discharge<sup>6</sup>.
- Use of bilingual medical staff as ad hoc interpreters has been demonstrated to be inefficient both in cost and time, as staff must abandon their own duties to perform a task that is not within their job description or skill set<sup>7, 8</sup>.

## QUALITY

- Trained interpreters improve quality of patient care and clinical outcomes<sup>2,4</sup>.
- Quality of care has been demonstrated to suffer when bilingual medical staff act as interpreters<sup>9, 10</sup>.

## CERTIFICATION

- As doctors must be certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties, and lawyers by the Bar Association, nationally recognized certification also exists for interpreters through the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) and the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI). The American Translators Association (ATA) offers certification for translators.
- The two medical certification exams for interpreters mentioned above assess candidates' interpreting skills as well as language proficiency, the ability to prepare for and manage the interpreted encounter, medical terminology, cultural competence, ethics, standards of practice, and sight translation.
- Many interpreting Language Service Providers (LSPs) do not require their interpreters to pass these nationally validated exams, but instead use their own in-house assessment tools, which almost invariably means that such LSP "certification" is reviewed only internally by the LSP that then contracts with the interpreters who take those exams.

## TITLE VI AND CLAS STANDARDS

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) mandate that language access services be effective, understandable, and comparable to services received by non-LEP patients.



# What can be done to comply with legislation and ensure effective budget use?

- Verify interpreter certification
  - Does the interpreter hold nationally validated credentials, or is their title of “certified interpreter” granted internally by the LSP that schedules their appointments?
- Test language proficiency
  - Several nationally validated language proficiency exams exist: e.g., the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) by the **American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)**.
- Select interpreters carefully
  - Take advantage of the language services directories of respected professional organizations and select the most highly qualified interpreter or translator for the task at hand.

OSTI, the Oregon Society of Translators and Interpreters, is a network of experienced independent professionals. Many are certified in their area of service (court interpreting, medical interpreting or translation), and many hold master’s, doctoral or law degrees, in addition to their many years of practice in the profession of translation and interpreting.

Since its inception, OSTI has participated in the discussion of professional issues and it welcomes interaction with all stakeholders. By articulating the issues confronting translators and interpreters in their work, OSTI helps to foster a better understanding of the profession. OSTI’s ultimate goal is to help the Oregon community cross the language barrier effectively both locally and internationally.

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