Working with Interpreters
Training Agenda

- Objectives
- Tips for Working with Interpreters
- Expectations for Interpreters
- Additional Resources
Objectives

- Improve skills for working with interpreters
- Improve patient outcomes through better communication
Tips for working with interpreters
The Middle of Everywhere

- Tips for working with interpreters in this presentation modified from book by Mary Pipher, the *Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community*, published by Harcourt.

- *The Middle of Everywhere* is available from amazon.com.

- Pipher holds a Ph.D. in psychology and lives in Lincoln, Nebraska.
How do I know if my patient needs an interpreter?

- The patient may be able to answer simple questions about where they live, but not speak English well enough for health care interactions.

- Use the Total Physical Response method—Ask your patient to complete a simple physical task; for example, “touch your nose”.

- Use the patient’s response to gauge their need for an interpreter.
Setting the Stage for Interpretation

- The interpreter should start interaction by explaining his or her role
  - The interaction is private
  - Everything that is said will be interpreted.

- If the interpreter does not start the interaction as explained above, the doctor or nurse should do it.

- If there is a complex situation, clarify expectations with the interpreter without the patient present prior to the interpretation event.
Interpreter Etiquette

- Address the patient, not the interpreter, and maintain primary eye contact with your patient.
- Don’t talk about the patient in his or her presence. Patients sometimes understand more than they can speak. Everything you say while the patient is in room will be interpreted.
- Treat the patient like an English speaker.
The Dialogue

- Keep a comfortable pace that will allow time for interpretation.
- Keep your sentences short. If necessary, ask patient to communicate in short, simple sentences.
- Avoid medical jargon and idiomatic expressions to make encounter less complicated.
- Listen without interrupting.
Ensure Understanding

- Confirm understanding and agreement with the patient to ensure compliance. For critical instructions, ask the patient to repeat instructions through the interpreter.
- If you perceive that the interpreter is abbreviating too much:
  - Ask, “What else did she say?”
  - Say, “Please interpret everything that the patient is saying.”
- Encourage the interpreter to clarify terms with you.
- The interpreter may take notes or consult a dictionary. This is an acceptable practice consistent with quality interpreting.
- Encourage the patient to ask questions. (Many cultures believe it is disrespectful to question authority figures such as physicians.)
Cultural Interpretation

- The interpreter may perceive cultural and emotional subtleties and may also be able to help with cultural interpretation.

- If you sense that the patient may not comply with your instructions, seek advice in private with medical interpreter.
Miscellaneous Tips

- Do not ask patients to bring their own interpreter.
- Do not ask another patient to help you interpret.
- Do not use children, family members or non-qualified staff.
- Do not allow interpreter to assume a member advocacy role.
Expectations for Interpreters
Accuracy

The interpreter should:
- Not omit, modify, or add.
- Interpret in the same tone.
- Correct their own mistakes.
- Interpret in the first person.
Confidentiality, Impartiality, and Respect

The interpreter:

- Maintains confidentiality
- Does not add his or her own opinion, advice or judgment
- Does disclose any conflict of interest
- Shows respect in culturally appropriate ways
- Promotes patient autonomy
Cultural Awareness and Professional Boundaries

The interpreter:

- Alerts all parties to a possible cultural misunderstanding
- Does not get personally involved with the patient
- Does not go beyond the role of interpreting
- Does not advocate for the patient
Finding Qualified Interpreters

- Check online to see which agencies local health plans are contracted with.
- Consider issuing a Request for Proposal or Request for Information
- Ask agencies for references
- Monitor to ensure good business practices are used by your interpreters
  - Do the interpreters use badges?
  - Does the agency use a standard work order?
Examples of Inappropriate Interpreter Behavior

- The interpreter asks you to sign interpreter work order even if interpreter missed the appointment.
- A family member serves as interpreter but asks you to sign a work order.
- The interpreter makes decisions for the patient, like when next appointment should be or where to be seen for care.
- The interpreter acts as the patient’s advocate or representative.
- The interpreter has side conversations with the patient without interpreting what is said.
Addressing a Problem with an Interpreter

- Address a minor problem with the interpreter by clarifying your expectations.
- Contact interpreter agency.
- If interpreter was provided by a health plan, contact health plan to file a complaint.
- If you suspect fraudulent activity, contact health plan’s fraud area or other law enforcement body.
  - For Medica, fraud hotlines are 952-992-2237 and 866-821-1331
Resources

- The National Council on Interpreting Health Care has a variety of resources:
  - www.ncihc.org
  - See in particular the following documents at ncihc.org:
    - “National Standards for Practice for Interpreters in Health Care”
    - “National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care”
    - “Guide to Initial Assessment of Interpreter Qualifications”
    - “The Terminology of Health Care Interpreting”

- Video: “Communicating Effectively through an Interpreter” available from www.xculture.org. (Charge is $150)

- Check with Medica Provider College for related materials on cultural competency and health literacy