



Utilizing Telephone Interpreters

Telephonic interpreting is definitely more challenging than onsite interpreting for many reasons. Here are some guidelines that will help the interpreter, patient and facility staff create a more efficient and streamlined interpretation session. Please provide this information to everyone at your facility that will be interacting with the patient and interpreter

1. Whether your facility is using dual handset phones or speakerphones* please make sure the phones provide good sound quality and are easily accessible. Having to repeat things because of line noise or a phone placed too far from the staff or patient will become frustrating for everyone involved. Background noise can also hinder the flow of a good interpretation session.
2. Each time an interpretation session is initiated ensure both the staff member and patient are aware of how to effectively use an over the phone interpreter. The interpreter can explain this to the patient when the session begins. Help the patient feel comfortable with the fact that what is said to the doctor will be held in confidence and their privacy will be respected.
3. Interpreters are trained to convey your emotion when translating your message to the patient. If you sound happy the interpreter will do their best to carry that emotion forward into their translation. Interpreters are instructed to replicate pace, style and tone of speech, since vocal emotions do come across on the phone and it is essential to the meaning of the message
4. Interpreters need time to interpret everything. If more than one person speaks, this will impact the interpreter's ability to accurately interpret what is being said. Help the interpreter by speaking in relatively short statements and by asking participants to speak one at a time, so the interpreter will have time to interpret both accurately and completely.
5. Avoid side conversations unless the interpreter is going to interpret what is being said. Leaving the patient out of the conversation is going to create isolation, tension and suspicion. In addition, the staff should know the interpreter and patient should not be having side conversations not only will you become suspicious of what the interpreter is talking about, but he/she will find it difficult to remain neutral throughout the interpretation after getting to know the patient on a personal level. However, some things don't translate exactly or require the use of more words in the target language.
6. Some of your staff may speak the target language, please refrain from speaking this language on the line with the interpreter. Over the phone this can become confusing to the interpreter as to who is speaking.
7. Follow up and educate your staff on current industry standards. Review the interpreter's Code of Ethics regularly.

* As per HIPAA regulations, the use of speakerphones should only occur in private exam rooms where conversations cannot be overheard.