

ETHICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS

Here are some tips to help you abide by the AUSIT Code of Ethics when asked to interpret in community settings, such as medical consultations or other interviews.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I AM OFFERED AN ASSIGNMENT?

Before accepting an assignment, ask the agency or party contracting you the following questions:

- a. The topic and nature of the assignment and any other information or materials so that you can prepare adequately
- b. The duration of the assignment

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ARRIVE AT AN ASSIGNMENT?

Introduce yourself to the receptionist. Below is a sample introduction:

“Good morning. My name is XX, and I am the X language professional interpreter for Mr X”.

- You will most probably be asked to sit next to the non-English speaker. Some big organisations, such as the Migration/Refugee Review Tribunal, have an interpreters’ waiting room, where you will be asked to wait.
- If you have a booking afterwards, tell the receptionist, so that they are made aware of the limits of your availability.
- If you did not get any briefing with the booking, you may want to ask the receptionist what the consultation/interview is about so that you can prepare any potential difficult terminology while you wait.
- You may also want to ask the non-English speaker to tell you what the interview will be about.

NB: Some users of interpreting services have complained about interpreters using their smart devices to Skype or answer phone calls in the middle of their assignments or while waiting, thus disrupting others. If you use smart devices to prepare for your assignment, you should make sure that the sound is turned off.

- You may also want to explain to the receptionist (when appropriate) that you will introduce yourself to the non-English speaker and explain your role as a professional interpreter to her/him.

WHAT DO I SAY TO THE NON-ENGLISH SPEAKER IN THE WAITING ROOM?

- Introduce yourself to the non-English speaker.
- Below is a sample introduction, which you can of course adapt to the needs of the speakers. Depending on the level of education of the person, you may have to explain the concepts below using different expressions and illustrative examples.

- Good morning. My name is XX and I am the X language professional interpreter. Have you ever worked with a professional interpreter before?"

If they say no, you may take the opportunity to explain your qualifications, accreditation and training. These are good opportunities to educate the public about Interpreting as a profession.

If they say yes, you may want to engage them in a conversation about what they understand your role is and what they expect you will be doing. This way you can correct any misunderstandings in a non confrontational way.

- I would like to explain how I work so that we can communicate effectively. First of all, I abide by a professional Code of Ethics, set by my professional association (AUSIT), which requires me to interpret everything that I hear fully and accurately. This means, that once we are inside the consultation/interview room, anything you say and anything the doctor¹ says, will be interpreted by me.
- So, if there is anything you don't want the doctor to hear, please do not say it, as I will be obliged to interpret it.
- Please address all questions to the doctor, as if you were speaking in the same language. For example, don't say "please ask her", just ask her the question and I will interpret in the same way. The same will happen when I interpret for the doctor. Do you understand?
- I would also like to assure you that I am required to maintain strict confidentiality. This means that anything I hear while interpreting will not be divulged outside of the consultation/interview room. I cannot tell anyone about what I heard during my interpreting work.
- I am also under an obligation to be completely impartial. I cannot take sides. I have no vested interest in the content or the outcome of the consultation/interview. My only interest is in being able to interpret fully and accurately.

¹ Replace 'doctor' for the relevant professional when needed.

- I will ask you to try and keep your turns relatively short, to allow me to interpret. I may look at you or put my hand up when I need you to stop to let me interpret.
- There may be times when I may need to stop you or the doctor to ask for clarifications, if there is a term or a concept I did not hear or understand.
- My role is to remove the language barrier so that you and your doctor can communicate as if you both spoke the same language. I cannot offer any opinions or advice.
- If you have any doubts, please do not hesitate to ask the doctor. I will interpret everything. The doctor is your doctor and you are his/her patient². S/he will be interested in hearing anything you would like to say. I'm there to interpret.
- Is there anything you did not understand? Is there anything you would like to ask me?"

- If the person is being accompanied by a relative or friend, explain that you will interpret everything they say as well. If the relative wants to ask the doctor a question directly, in English, they can do that. Explain that while they are speaking to the doctor in English you will be interpreting to the non English speaking patient simultaneously, everything that the relative and the doctor are saying.
- After your introduction, you may want to ask them to tell you about the reason for the interview, to familiarise yourself with the topic. However, you need to make sure that they understand that they cannot rely on you to relay any information to the service provider, as you can only interpret what is said at the time of the interview.

WHAT WILL I ACHIEVE BY FOLLOWING THESE TIPS?

By the time you have finished explaining your role and setting the ground rules, hopefully the patient will be called in and you would have used the waiting time wisely.

The above is only a sample. We don't recommend that you read this or memorise it. You will need to use your professional judgement to decide what and how to say it to each individual.

² Replace the word 'patient' with the relevant term depending on the situation.

By using the waiting time in this way, you will achieve a number of important goals:

- You will be educating the non-English speaker about how to effectively speak through an interpreter
- You will help raise the status of the profession and raise their awareness about the importance of using the services of a professional interpreter
- You will help them see you as a professional, rather than a bilingual or compatriot who is there 'just to help out'
- You will avoid any potential ethical dilemmas that may arise from their telling you compromising information
- You will pre-empt and stop potentially difficult situations during the consultation
- You will help ensure that you perform ethically and interpret accurately
- You will be setting a good example for AUSIT members

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ENTER THE CONSULTATION/INTERVIEW ROOM?

Introduce yourself to the doctor. Below is a sample introduction:

- Good morning. My name is XX and I am the X language professional interpreter. Have you ever worked with a professional interpreter before?

If they say no, you may want to say the following:

- Do you mind if I quickly tell you how professional interpreters work?
- I will interpret everything directly, in the first person, so I will ask you to please direct all your questions to your patient. Similarly, I will interpret everything your patient says in the same manner.
- If there is anything you do not want the patient to hear, please don't say it because I'm obliged by my professional Code of Ethics to interpret everything that I hear.

After you have finished this introduction, ask the service provider to allow you to tell the non-English speaker that you have just explained your role to them, so as to maintain complete transparency between all the parties.

Once that is complete, then you can tell the service provider that you are ready to start interpreting.

From that time onwards, you will interpret everything directly in the first and second grammatical persons.