THE INTERPRETATION & TRANSLATION SERVICE (ITS)

HOW TO WORK WITH INTERPRETERS GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL AND NHS LOTHIAN STAFF

2003 EDITION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Interpretation & Translation Service (ITS) is part of the City of Edinburgh Council and is available to all Council departments and the NHS in Lothian.

The ITS provides interpreters and translations in about 40 community languages and British Sign Language. ITS works on a priority need basis and, except for emergencies, appointments must be booked well in advance. It is advisable to book an interpreter as soon as an appointment is made with the service user.

There is no charge to individual departments except in some limited cases. The costs of translating written health materials are not covered by the funding agreement.

These Guidelines should be used in conjunction with the Guidelines for Council and NHS Lothian Staff on How to Use the ITS. The following information provides a set of minimum guidelines that must be followed in order to make best use of the ITS. The ITS will provide additional information where needed.

A. BOOKING INTERPRETERS

It is the Council's and NHS Lothian's policy to provide interpreters and translations when requested by service users. The responsibility to arrange an interpreter lies with staff, not with service users.

1. Check with the service user whether they need an interpreter. Make sure you know what language/dialect is spoken by the service user. Use the ITS Language Chart and check with the service user or ITS if unsure.

2. Check whether the gender of the interpreter is appropriate for the meeting. In some cultures it is considered inappropriate, for instance, for men to interview women especially in private meeting rooms.

3. Communicating through an interpreter takes longer than speaking directly to the service user. It is imperative therefore to allow more time when booking in order not to rush the meeting (for example 10 minutes before and after the scheduled appointment).

4. Advise the ITS of the nature of the appointment, especially if you are going to discuss issues of a sensitive nature, for example, termination of a pregnancy. This information will assist the ITS to select the most appropriate interpreter for the job and will enable the interpreter to be better prepared.

B. BEFORE THE SESSION

1. Brief the interpreter by providing them with a short summary of the reasons for the appointment. The information provided should be brief, highlighting key issues/information needed. Sight translation of technical material should not be done at a meeting without proper briefing and preparation.

2. Agree the environment in which the appointment is going to take place. Ideally, the appointment should take place in a private area. This will help to build user confidence in both the service provider and the interpreter (particularly if the matter to be discussed is of a sensitive nature).

3. If it is a group meeting, for instance a case review, make sure there is adequate seating and the interpreter and service user are allocated seats where they can make eye contact with the whole group. This will help to ensure that everyone present will be heard and that the nuances of language will not be lost. Notes of talks and speeches should be sent to the ITS well in advance of any meeting or conference.

C. THE SESSION

1. Introduce the interpreter and everyone present to the service user.

2. Ensure that all parties understand the interpreting process and the impartial role of the interpreter before the appointment begins.

3. It is important to stress that any information disclosed during the session will be kept confidential.

4. Speak directly to the service user, i.e. *“What is your name?”* not *“Ask him what his name is”.*

5. Ask everyone present if they can all be seen and heard by everyone else. Impress on all present that they must also speak directly to the service user.

6. Avoid jargon. User clear, unambiguous language, i.e. Plain English. The interpreter has to understand clearly what they are to interpret. A lot of jargon does not translate easily and lengthy explanations will add to the time available.

   If jargon or technical terms are unavoidable the interpreter may need to take notes and explain the meanings to the service user. This is not uncommon and should be explained to all present.

7. If using consecutive interpreting, i.e. the interpreter waits while you speak and then relays the message while you wait, break at reasonable intervals. Depending on the circumstances, this may be every few sentences.

   If using simultaneous interpreting, i.e. the interpreter interprets what you are saying as you say it, speak at a reasonable pace and allow the interpreter to catch up if necessary.

8. Do not ask or allow others to ask the interpreter for advice or explanations other than on linguistic matters. The interpreter is not there to provide advocacy or emotional support to service users. It is essential not to leave the interpreter alone with the service user.

9. The interpreter may intervene, and explain why, in both languages, for four reasons:

   - To clarify their understanding of what they are to interpret;
   - To ask individuals to accommodate the interpreting process, for example, for individuals to speak up or to speak more slowly;
   - To alert the parties to a missed cultural inference and ask for an explanation which they will then interpret;
   - To alert the parties that, despite correct interpreting, the message may not have been understood.

10. Allow the interpreter a break of 10 or 15 minutes every hour. Allow a British Sign Language interpreter a break of 5 or 10 minutes every half-hour.

D. AFTER THE SESSION

1. Ask for general or specific feedback from the interpreter as to how the session went and if there were any problems. Make a note of these and take corrective action if required.

2. Complete and sign the interpreter's Remuneration Claims Form.

3. Advise the ITS Office of any concerns and comments.

Language is not a Barrier

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