

Working With An Interpreter Training Tool

Please review these guidelines before working with a client and an interpreter. The intent of these guidelines is to decrease your feelings of anxiousness that the session is less effective because of the language barrier; that you are less connected to the patient; and of resenting the added time required for the session.

Remember, an effective session will ensure the patient has a positive experience.

1. Talk to the patient, not the interpreter! This means keeping eye contact solely on the patient. Address her directly (versus asking the question of the interpreter).
2. Brief the interpreter first. Summarize the purpose of the session (e.g. health history, lab tests, birth control education) and review the Interpreter Agreement.
3. Avoid long or complicated sentences. Be concise and try to avoid unnecessary words or ideas.
4. Keep it short. Don't talk for more than one or two minutes without stopping in order to allow the interpreter to explain what you have said.
5. Explain how the session will be conducted. Encourage the patient to ask questions and to let the interpreter know if there are terms she does not understand.
6. Be aware that most patients will speak some English and will understand some of what you are saying.
7. Try not to make assumptions how she may feel about her decision based on what you know about her cultural/ethnic group. Allow her to bring up her own concerns.
8. Don't interrupt the interpreter. Don't be impatient. Permit the interpreter to take as much time as necessary to clarify a point or relay information.
9. Talk slowly! Use simple terms and avoid using jargon that would only be familiar to clinic staff (e.g. "lam appointment," "mife," or "miso").
10. Ask the interpreter to ask the patient of any cultural belief that may affect the treatment plan. Assure the patient that you respect these beliefs and, if possible, will tailor the session to meet her needs.
11. Check-in with both the interpreter and patient throughout the session. Make sure that you feel comfortable with how the information is being relayed and that the patient is receiving the information she wants. Make sure that the patient knows that it is okay to ask questions by reminding the interpreter throughout that you welcome questions from the patient.