Tips for Working with an Interpreter

PREPARING FOR THE INTERPRETATION SESSION

- Make a diligent effort to find professionally trained, qualified interpreters.
- Don't depend on children or other relatives and friends, or nonmedical staff, to interpret.
- Hold a brief pre-interview meeting with the interpreter.
- Establish a good working relationship with the interpreter.
- Plan to allow enough time for the interpreted sessions.
- Don't ask or say anything that you don't want the patient to hear.

DURING THE INTERPRETATION SESSION:

- Use carefully chosen words to convey your meaning, and limit the use of gestures.
- Speak in a normal voice, clearly, and not too fast or too loudly.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Keep your utterances short, pausing to permit the interpretation.
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Expect the interpreter to interrupt when necessary for clarification.
- Expect the interpreter to take notes if things get complicated.
- Be prepared to repeat yourself in different words if your message is not understood.
- Have a brief post-interview meeting with the interpreter.
- Remember that the interpreter is not there (just) to interpret for the patient or to interpret the patient's language.
- Use a seating arrangement in which you, the patient, and the interpreter form the points of a triangle.

Provider's Guide to Quality and Culture. Management Sciences for Health. Available at: http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=1.0.htm&module=provider&language=English