

Hi. I thought I would recap our "homework" from the meeting:

With regard to drafting alternate paths of training and learning, it would be every helpful if you could all send me the following:

1. The path that would be taken by an interpreter in an ideal world
2. The background and experiences of 2 or 3 people you consider model interpreters who have achieved the desired level of knowledge, skill and expertise in their craft.

Thanks, Tara

Answer submitted by JB

I have a couple of examples of “good paths” taken into the interpreting profession among my staff interpreters. The first is an obvious one: two of our interpreters began by receiving degrees in Spanish/English interpretation and translation from universities in their native countries. One of them, after coming to the United States, immediately sought additional training as a legal interpreter at the Agnes Haury Institute of the University of Arizona. She then gained certification for court interpreting and worked for a few years as a court interpreter before moving into the medical interpreting field. At this point, for medical interpreting, she did not feel she would gain more specialized knowledge than she already had gained by enrolling in the three-year certification program at the University of Minnesota. Instead, she took advantage of the same Agnes Haury Institute’s development of a 50-hour intensive medical interpreter training program to sharpen her medical interpreting knowledge and skills. At this point, I am confident that she would perform excellently on any type of certification examination for medical interpreters.

The other who had received a degree in interpreting and translation actually decided to pursue a career in translation before becoming an interpreter. As I see it, working as a translator gave her a good background for medical interpretation, where our central concern is communicating meaning. While she admits that she struggles with simultaneous interpretation, it is a pleasure to listen to her interpret consecutively because she works hard to make each statement sound natural in the target language. Her experience makes me believe that even if someone entering the profession is not a writer and has no desire to work as a translator, it is important that medical interpreters have training in translation as part of their educational background. In this way, I see that there is some value in making translation or site translation part of the evaluation criteria in certifying medical interpreters. It’s a good method for assessing how complete the interpreter’s education has been and kind of gives a window into whether someone “gets” the idea of concerning him/herself with conveying meaning.

As for an ideal path to licensure/certification, I would think of it in terms of its components: formal education, service learning/real-world practice, and examination. On the side of formal education, I’ve had good experiences with those who have earned degrees in interpretation/translation from foreign universities and those who have completed the certification program at the University of Minnesota. They seem to have a good background in terms of ethical guidelines and depth of medical knowledge. At the

same time, there is no good substitute for experience in terms of learning how the medical system functions and in terms of discovering how to build rapport with medical providers. Internship or service learning also gives a beginning interpreter the chance to learn from mentors such things as cultural mediation strategies or methods of intervening to advocate for a patient's health (in the way that is most appropriate for an interpreter). Examination, in the ideal world, would ultimately classify interpreters' readiness for practice in a few different "levels" of circumstances.