

Table 1. Tips for Using a Medical Interpreter

- Identify patients who may need an interpreter
- Allow extra time for the interview
- Meet with the interpreter before the interview to give some background, build rapport, and set goals
- Document the name of the interpreter in the progress note
- Realize that most patients understand some English, so do not make comments you do not want them to understand
- Seat the interpreter next to or slightly behind the patient
- Speak directly to the patient, not the interpreter
- Use first-person statements (“I” statements); avoid saying “he said” or “tell her”
- Speak in short sentences or short thought groups
- Ask only one question at a time
- Allow appropriate time for the interpreter to finish the statement
- Prioritize and limit the key points to three or fewer
- Do not use idioms, acronyms, jargon, or humor
- Insist on sentence-by-sentence interpretation to avoid tangential conversations
- Allow 10-minute breaks for every hour of interpretation
- Use the “teach back” or “show me” technique to ensure patient comprehension
- Have a post-session discussion with the interpreter to get further details and make corrections, if necessary