

Healthcare settings and training interpreters

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Abstract:

When any large British organisation has problems communicating with its client group, it only takes the presence of a couple of non-English speakers to throw them into sharp relief. Work as an interpreter in healthcare settings has its own peculiar challenges which set it apart from legal and other spheres of public service work. Institutional settings rarely provide ideal circumstances for the interpreting process to be carried out, and hospitals offer some of the most testing examples. Some of these are inherent in the medical specialty itself and bring linguistic and cultural brokerage issues into sharp focus. Interpreters must be trained to cope with the special problems of working in healthcare. The blurred edges of their role, in institutional terms, can throw up serious ethical dilemmas. Practical difficulties such as acoustics are all too often not resolvable. Impartiality can be very hard to maintain in some circumstances. There are very specific ethical and linguistic difficulties inherent in some therapeutic specialties, which present real training issues and a need for serious research. Finally, interpreters must learn to take care of themselves and one another. This will be a presentation using exemplars taken from experience to describe current reality, and consider implications for the future.