

# Some ideas on interpreting in healthcare settings

Jan Cambridge

## **Abstract:**

Although the skills demanded of PSIs are generic across the PSI field, the demands made on interpreters working in the area of health differ somewhat from those made on legal interpreters. This is often due to the low level of understanding and acceptance within those institutional settings of the need to provide an interpreting service based on trained professionals, and to manage them accordingly. (See Corsellis in this volume)

This chapter will briefly summarise the development of the whole PSI field to date, in the UK and elsewhere, outlining the style of current provision of interpreting services within UK healthcare institutions. The role of the public service interpreter will be discussed, as will the reasons why personnel with no relevant professional training, relatives and children, are unsuitable as interpreters. The impartial model of interpreting has become the accepted norm in most UK PSI settings, and will be explained in detail along with the major interpreting modalities used. Interpreters are brokers not only of linguistic but also of mutual cultural understanding. Cross-cultural communication must always be a two-way street, especially for interpreters. The interpreter is the only person within a conversation who has access to all the signals being sent, in both cultural senses. Paralinguistic and metalinguistic signals do not carry universal meaning and this concept must be ever present in the mind of the PSI.

One thing that marks PSIs out – especially in hospital settings – from other groups of interpreters is the use of non-standard versions of either language. Patients rarely use the same register as their doctors. Some words used are unlikely to appear in dictionaries; many languages spoken will have considerable geographical spread; the language in use will often express fear, pain, anxiety, anguish – in short, it is emotional language. These are the particular challenges to an interpreter.