



Interpreter Act Ensures Safety for Deaf and Hard Of Hearing in Medical Settings

In September of 2007, the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007, was signed into law in the State of Illinois. This bill established important statewide licensing standards for registered interpreters, protecting the deaf and hard of hearing by establishing accountability for the profession.

As we enter into 2009, the law will go into full swing; all interpreters are required to have a license in order to provide interpreting services. Proficiency levels include intermediate, advanced and master. For hospitals and medical settings, the type of license an interpreter has determines where he or she can provide services:

Proficiency level	Location
Intermediate	Nursing and personal care (nursing homes) Non-clinical routines
Advanced	Clinical appointments Emergency room Obstetrics Life-threatening medical situations Psychiatry (routine clinical, crisis intervention, hospitalization)
Master	All of the above

Due to interpreter shortages, some exceptions were built into the Bill that allows individuals to fill in for a licensed interpreter when necessary. Most importantly for hospitals and health care providers, according to the Bill, unlicensed individuals may interpret “in an emergency situation involving health care services in which the consumer and health care provider or professional agree that the delay necessary to obtain a licensed interpreter is likely to cause injury or loss to the consumer.”

Previously, sign language interpreters were required to register with the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission; however, due to a lack of standards, a deaf or hard of hearing individual could have varying experiences. This law not only established standards, but allows for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to file complaints against interpreters, allowing for discipline. Institutions that do not comply with the law are subject to disciplinary hearings and fines of up to \$2,500 for each offense.

In hospitals settings, where communication is key to health and well-being, it is imperative that the deaf and hard of hearing receive accurate medical interpretation so that the patient can not only understand their ailment, but make an educated treatment decision. As the hospital industry and the nation head into tough economic times, it may be fiscally impossible for some hospitals to hire a full-time licensed interpreter for their facility.

There are however other ways for hospitals to ensure that they fully comply with this law. Services are available today that use call center technology to create a reliable network of advanced-licensed sign language interpreters. As a resource to Illinois hospitals, the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, has



developed such a tool, the Illinois Video Interpreter Network (IVIN) for Healthcare, which allows hospitals to access qualified interpreters from a network formed by participating hospitals. Currently, the network can provide advanced-licensed sign language interpreters.

Through innovative programs, hospitals can ensure that their deaf and hard of hearing patients receive quality interpretation services without a huge added expense. For a copy of the Act or to learn more information about IVIN, go to www.mchc.org.