



So you're interested in becoming a medical interpreter...

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What is the difference between "interpretation" and "translation"?

Interpretation is the conversion of a message uttered in a source language into an equivalent message in the target language so that the intended recipient of the message responds to it as if he or she had heard it in the original one. To be able to do this, the interpreter must not only be fluent in both the source and target languages but must also have the skills and knowledge base to be able to comprehend the message quickly in the source language and just as quickly re-express it in the target language. Equivalence, however, does not mean a literal or word-for-word conversion from one language into the other. Rather, it requires an analysis of the original message in order to render the fullness of its meaning in another language. The primary test of a competent interpreter, therefore, is the accuracy and completeness of the interpretation. Translation is the conversion of written text from one language into another, while interpretation involves the spoken word. Properly translated written materials can be critical to ensuring effective communication in the medical settings such as in the case of obtaining informed consent, establishing advanced directives, and issuing discharge instructions and prescriptions. Source: Medical Interpreting Standards of Practice, IMIA

I am bilingual in English and Spanish, and am interested in becoming a medical interpreter. What should I do?

Your bilingual status helps in becoming an interpreter but it is not, however, the only factor involved. A medical interpreter must not only be fluent in both the source and target languages, but must also have the skills and knowledge base to quickly comprehend the message in the source language, and just as quickly re-express it in the target language. To do this, a person must have interpreting skills, knowledge about specialized medical terminology and concepts, and be able to adhere to the Code of Ethics for medical interpreters. There are many training programs available for interpreters, both experienced and novice. Your participation in such training will help ensure that you are on the right path to becoming a medical interpreter. Most job opportunities across the country require training and testing before hiring you as a medical interpreter.

How do I know if I am fluent enough in English and/or the other language(s) I speak?

The best way is for you get tested or prove an educational level in that language that precludes testing. There is a list of testing organizations and scores required for certification at <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/prerequisites>

What training is required to become a medical interpreter?

Go to the IMIA Training Directory to see training opportunities to become a medical interpreter at <http://www.imiaweb.org/education/trainingnotices.asp> (Note: If you do not find one in their state, there are two online programs available to all languages and all states. You should also be aware that your English needs to be at a certain level before pursuing or studying for this profession, and this information is in the certification section, under pre-requisites.

How much do medical interpreters make?

Go to the link below to peruse the yearly IMIA Salary Survey data which can be reviewed by state or language at <http://www.imiaweb.org/about/default.asp>

Will I have to go through a certification process?

Our certification section describes steps to become a certified medical interpreter to earn the CMI credential for spoken language interpreters. It might be useful to you if you want to pursue this career. <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/prerequisites> Sign language interpreters have their own certification process, and information can be found at www.rid.org

What do I need to do to join the IMIA?

If you are interested in joining the organization, you can go to <http://www.imiaweb.org/members/application.asp> You will be able to see all the members only information and become abreast of the field in preparation to embark in this new profession. However, be aware that until you become a trained and tested medical interpreter you should join as an associate member. Job opportunities that are listed on our website for members require medical interpreter training.