



THE NATIONAL BOARD OF CERTIFICATION FOR MEDICAL INTERPRETERS

National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters - Report from the ATA 50th Annual Conference NYC October 28-31, 2009

Prepared By: Linda Joyce

The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters was very pleased to participate in the recent ATA 50th Annual Conference, held in New York City on October 28-31, 2009 and introduce conference attendees to the nations' first National Medical Interpreter Certification.

Interest was extremely high from the over 2,300 attendees representing dozens of countries.



*Registration & Information Area for the
National Certification Test*

Members of The National Board offered attendees information about the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters process, and the activities around the certification effort. There was a constant flow of people to the IMIA table with a keen interest in what the National Board had to offer – some were interpreters, some interpreter trainers, some providers and many others - who came by, inquiring about the certification process, how the process works and how to register.

There were many discussions on certification at the other events, receptions, and in the corridors, as certification for medical interpreters is a hot topic. Several attendees mentioned that they had attended IMIA, TAPIT, CHIA, TAHIT, NATI and other conferences where they had already heard about the launch of national medical interpreter certification.



Interpreters holding medical interpreter signs

A session - Open Dialog on National Interpreter Certification: Possibility or Pipe Dream? - included several speakers

discussing the possibility of a generalist interpreter certification as well as information on the status for the specializations: ASL, community, medical, conference and legal (court) interpreter certification or lack thereof. Katherine Allen, a freelance interpreter who is on the CHIA Board, was charged with presenting the progress toward medical interpreter certification and attempted to give a balanced presentation, admitting the challenges. Katharine concluded that just a couple of years ago many in the field were saying national medical interpreter certification was years away. She noted that developments that have occurred this year from the National Board and other efforts are positive, since it will afford a framework for the profession as well as a baseline for competency that will evolve in future iterations of the test. The point is, she said, is that we have started that process. The room was packed and a poll by the moderator showed that there were interpreters, interpreter trainers and association leaders in the room among others.

In this discussion, an attendee suggested including languages where no certification exists – in her case, Hebrew pointing out that there is a “hunger for credentials.” The National Board representative spoke of the 23 year process towards certification and the issue of patient safety and for everyone to become informed and involved in building the field. A participant also refuted the idea that for-profits somehow “taint” the process – and emphasized that it takes everybody to do a project of this magnitude and we need to work together and not exclude anyone. To conclude, the moderator pointed to the early divisions in the sign language interpreters field between the RID and NAD during their certification history, and how they came together later to form the National Council on Interpreting. He offered that this may happen in medical interpreting.

Thank you ATA for a wonderful conference and 50 years of contributions to the field!