



**INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL
INTERPRETERS ASSOCIATION**
Leading the advancement of professional interpreters

In the early 1980s, Boston began to receive an increased number of non-English speaking newcomers, particularly refugees from Southeast Asia and Haiti. Serendipitously, Raquel Cashman also came to Boston from her home in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and took a position as Manager of Interpreter Services at Boston City Hospital. She met with several interpreters and other Coordinators/Managers of Interpreter Services to learn more about how language access to healthcare was made possible for these patients. Representatives from Beth Israel Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Cambridge City Hospital, New England Medical Center, Mass. General Hospital and Somerville Hospital were included in these initial gatherings.

Since those early days, the medical interpreter landscape has changed considerably:

- The Massachusetts Medical Interpreter Association, founded in 1986, was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1992. We continue to be the first and largest organization of medical interpreters in the country.
- The first [Standards of Practice](#) for Medical Interpreters was published in 1995 by the MMIA and Education Development Center and has been widely received and utilized across the country and abroad.
- Educational opportunities for medical interpreters are now available in several locations, at various levels, and through both public and private institutions.
- The first Medical Interpreter Conference was held in 1997 and has become an annual international event.
- The MMIA is very close to achieving certification for medical interpreters and will continue to lead the advancement of professional medical interpreters.

In 2007, the association went international and became the International Medical Interpreters Association

MMIA Goes International:

(Posted on April eNews and home page during April 2007)

At the Critical Link Conference in Sydney, Australia, we made history by announcing to the world our move to become the International Medical Interpreters Association. International delegates received this message with great enthusiasm and pledges of support and collaboration.

Almost since its inception, the MMIA has been a national organization as members joined from all over the country to work together for the advancement of medical interpreters. The MMIA Standards of Practice was adopted on a national level at the 4th National Working Group conference in Seattle, WA, May 17th -- 19th, 1998, and by many organizations around the country and the MMIA Conference was attended by international multidisciplinary stakeholders, all with an interest in medical interpreting and in the mission of our organization.

According to our membership stats, we found out when we moved into office in the Summer of 2006 that only 800 of our 1,500 members were from Massachusetts. We were



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quite surprised, and knew that we tended to cater to the Massachusetts members needs although never thought that our out of state numbers were so high. We actually had received complaints in the past from out of state members about being so Massachusetts oriented. We were also asked frequently by email if out of state members could join.

On October 17th we see that since then (with all the renewals, new members, drop outs etc.) we now have 1,597 members, and of those, 655 members are from Massachusetts. Since our membership is open to all, our membership demographics will always be in a state of flux, and we are committed and legally obliged to serve all members equally, regardless of where they are from or practice.

The board struggled with the name change, as we are mostly a national organization, and not an "International" one, although we do have some international members and our name change will invite more. We did not want to compete with another organization: the National Council for Healthcare Interpreting, which is not an interpreter association, but there would then be TWO organizations with very similar names and goals and that could become a problem and we had to be sensitive to that.

So we opted for the International name which allows us to include all of our members, even our international members. We also want our members to be connected with the interpreter communities in their home countries. This move also benefits the organization in our fundraising efforts, which can now go beyond state or local funding sources. Medical interpreting has gone global, and it was foremost a pioneering decision, as much of our leadership work involves anticipating needs to come for the industry.

With regards to where the conference will be, there are already TWO international conferences on interpreting, the FIT one and the Critical Link one, so there is no need to move our conference around internationally. Our conference has been the NATIONAL conference for many years, and we have seen that our new name has prompted greater participation from the international community. Boston is the birthplace of medical interpreting, and we are guaranteeing with this name change that our conferences continue to draw the largest crowds and experts in the field for many decades to come.

The MMIA has always been a pioneer in the field, and has worked hard to promote collaboration and serve as a clearinghouse and catalyst for change in this specialized field. Now, the MMIA is again a pioneer in filling a void that has been present for a long time. Some countries are very advanced in healthcare interpreting, while others could benefit from what we have learned and have to offer. Most importantly this new structure will enable a more collegial collaboration among our international members. Please let your international colleagues know that there is now an international medical interpreter association, the IMIA.

How will this affect the state of Massachusetts? It will allow Massachusetts to continue in



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its leadership role as an interpreter association, and allow us to continue to serve our membership and create opportunities for all to work together to achieve our local goals, as well better serving our out of state and international members. Our Rhode Island Chapter members, for example, will benefit from this change. While we may certainly feel a loss to not be called the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association, we prefer to build on this organization's great history, and fulfill our fiduciary responsibility to the membership to lead the organization into the future.

If you're a state, out-of-state or international member, let us know how you feel! We know name changes can be emotional. We are honored that you voted for us to lead the organization to the next level, and that is what we are doing. We now await your individual vote to ratify the board's decision. This is a natural move for the organization. Comments about going international can be sent to Marzena Laslie, at mmiaml@aol.com.

We are at a critical juncture in our development, both as an organization and as a profession. We hope you join with us in helping to provide access to quality healthcare for all persons through the promotion of professional medical interpreter services.