



***THE PATIENT ISN'T YOUR***  
**Crash Test Dummy!**

**The Value of  
Practice  
Interpreting**

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## ***Ready, Set, ...***

Once you decide that working as a medical interpreter is for you, the first thing on your mind is to jump in and help the first person you can at their appointment.

You've discovered a passion, a new path in life you didn't even know existed!

You're excited at the opportunity to use your language skills to connect the cultures in your community. Doing so while making some cash only makes it more appealing.

But before you get started...



# ... **Slow!**

I caution you to wait.

Working in the medical field is the desired outcome. But just like you thought you could drive when you were 12, you later learned that there's a lot more to it than pushing the pedal and steering the wheel. There is another parallel to driving and interpreting. Without proper training you could seriously injure yourself and others.



Let me explain.

Driving a car without proper training will inevitably cause a crash and the outcome could be hospitalization or even death. The patient you're excited to help is no different. If a medical interpreter enters an appointment without the proper skills and training, they are putting the patient's health and the provider's reputation at risk. It's all too easy for well-intentioned people to have a negative impact on patient care.

*"It's all too easy for well-intentioned people to have a negative impact on patient care."*

Medical interpreters need to facilitate communication by staying faithful to the message. You never know what the provider is looking for by asking questions as simple as "Where are you from originally?" or an OB nurse commenting "You have beautiful hair." to a new mother. Your job is to interpret everything, adding and omitting nothing.

And this is not easy.

# Make Time for Practice



Practice interpreting with scripted dialogues is a way to develop your interpreting skills without using a patient as your crash test dummy. They offer you a practical way to develop your interpreting skills. By simulating real life conversation you can begin to experience what it means to be an interpreter.

Dialogues give you access to the minds of medical interpreters who've spent years in the field. This is great if you don't have a mentor or teacher that can help you gain experience. Dialogues can also help add variety to existing training programs. The more diverse the dialogues, the more opportunity you have to simulate the real life experiences of a working interpreter.

If you're anything like me, you like to learn for learning's sake. You may have read up on code of ethics, standards of practice and maybe even purchased a bilingual medical dictionary. Maybe you're even a member of an interpreting organization or a few discussion boards. These are all great and essential to your professional development.

But they are limited in their scope. You cannot gain practical experience with them. It's one thing to understand what a medical interpreter should do. It's another thing to know how to do what a medical interpreter does.

Dialogues give you the opportunity to develop those practical skills.

*"Dialogues give you access to the minds of medical interpreters who've spent years in the field."*

# Safety First!

You may share my fear of failure. I shudder at the thought of being revealed as an imposter, as someone who doesn't know what they're doing.

But not to fear. Dialogues are like the parking lot you learned to drive in. Here are three major benefits role-playing with dialogues gives you that real life encounters do not:



**Time  
Out!**

1. You (trainee) have the luxury to say “I need a break!” and step away to reset the brain – not so much when the provider and patient are staring at you for a response in the exam room.

2. You have time to discuss and evaluate your performance with your role-play partners in real time. This is something even field observation doesn't offer. Your mentor can't interrupt an appointment to give you coaching and feedback while people are depending on your interpreting. At the very best, this type of coaching and feedback on the finer points of your performance has to happen after the fact.



**Try  
Again**



**Good  
Job!**

3. Building your experience, and therefore your confidence, in interpreting in front of others happens in a non-threatening environment with role-play dialogues. Even when you're being critiqued, your role-play teammates are “on your side” and want you to succeed. This isn't always the case in the field. In real life you may encounter bilingual family members or providers who are less-than friendly about your presence and eager to “show” that you're not able to interpret. If you've already experienced being evaluated in the comfort of a classroom, you're that much ahead of the game in the exam room.

Now let's move on to other ways dialogues can help you.

# In The Classroom

Familiarizing yourself with terminology is critical and dialogues help you with that.

Knowing how to say “jaundice” is no more important than knowing how to say “diaper.” The word “scab” is just as important as “birth certificate.” My point is that there are words and phrases that are common to medical conversations that you won’t find in medical books. If you don’t use dialogues to practice, you could be caught off guard and miss something simple, yet very important. This is why you need to practice with simulated medical encounters.

Another benefit is strengthening your memory skills to retain greater amounts of information.

Why, you ask?

Your ability to recall this information without having to contemplate how you’ll structure your interpretation is another benefit of dialogues. Your memory is like a muscle and an interpreter is like a professional athlete. You need it to build muscle memory so it can function as efficiently as possible. This is critical to your effectiveness as an interpreter. The information needs to be exact to the intended message and natural to the people receiving that message.

If you’re to accomplish this, you can’t stop the communication to look up words and then decide which ones you’ll use or, worse yet, make something up based on what you think was said because you can’t remember what the speaker said.



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# Getting Behind-The-Wheel

Dedicating time to practicing dialogue interpreting has benefits that go well beyond the obvious.

Managing the flow of communication, consecutive interpreting, memory and recall, accuracy and completeness, terminology and being introduced to medical routines are just a few.

When used properly role-play can give you confidence that will help you manage the encounters, making it easy for all parties involved. Whether you are new to medical interpreting or a seasoned veteran, interpreting dialogues should be a standard part of your professional development. Use them well and you will find greater success in your career as a medical interpreter.

Remember that *your job* is to keep patients safe by helping them do *their job* - which is taking an active role in their own health care. Don't use a patient as your crash test dummy. You feel the need for speed but don't forget to develop your driving skills, or in your case, interpreting skills, before you put the rubber to the road.



# Thank You!



## Come grow with us!

Training, development and coaching for healthcare interpreters

Connecting Cultures has spent over a decade pushing the boundaries of medical interpreter training, and leading interpreters of all languages beyond the basics of medical vocabulary and interpreter theory.

We explore the nitty gritty of medical interpreting, the dynamic and unpredictable nature of healthcare and the on-the-job challenges interpreters face.

Connecting Cultures Interpreter Development students build upon the skills they've already attained and leave exuding a renewed confidence and passion for their work.

For more information about interpreter education, visit us at [www.interpreterdevelopment.com](http://www.interpreterdevelopment.com), and check out our very own interpreter practice dialogues at [www.interpreterdevelopment.com/dialogues](http://www.interpreterdevelopment.com/dialogues).

