

May 9, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Coalition Aims at Certification for Health Care Interpreters

The drive for a national certification for healthcare interpreting advanced this week with the selection of a broad range of stakeholder organizations to develop the certification through the National Coalition on Health Care Interpreter Certification.

The 17-member coalition includes organizations from among interpreting associations, training institutions, the language service industry, healthcare systems and employers, consumer groups, and government entities. The Coalition's first meeting will occur on May 29-30 in Chicago. Funding for the meetings comes through the non-profit foundation The California Endowment.

The historic meeting launches a multi-year project, in which the Coalition will evaluate current healthcare interpreting testing instruments, investigate testing tools, consider certification in multiple languages, and develop a strategy for implementation.

Four non-profits – The American Translator's Association (ATA), the California Healthcare Interpreting Association (CHIA), the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), and National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) – are serving as the Coordinating Committee for the coalition. On Tuesday they announced the selection of the following organizations to join them in the Coalition.

Association of Language Companies, Arlington, VA

California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, Oakland, CA

Center for Immigrant Health, New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY

CyraCom International, Tucson, AZ

Institute for Diversity in Health Management of the American Hospital Association, Chicago, IL

International Institute of Akron, Akron, OH

Jewish Vocational Services, Kansas City, MO

Language Line Services, Monterey, CA

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Boston, MA

National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), St. Paul, MN

National Health Law Program, Washington DC

Portland Community College/Institute for Health Professionals, Portland, OR

Spectrum Health, Translation and Interpreting Services, Grand Rapids, MI

“We’re extremely excited about the National Coalition’s efforts to further define professional standards for medical interpreters,” said Karin Ruschke, who represents the NCIHC on the National Coalition’s Coordinating Committee. “This critical work builds upon our longstanding efforts toward professional certification for health care interpreters, a vital step toward improving patient care and addressing health care disparities.”

“It’s encouraging to see that the process for developing a national certification for healthcare interpreters has finally begun with the coming together of this multidisciplinary coalition,” said Elizabeth Nguyen, President of CHIA. “This will be a long and complex process, requiring widespread support from the field and a high level of sustained commitment from all participants.”

The Coalition’s work will include the organization and oversight of expert workgroups dedicated to specific aspects of the process.

Nguyen noted that the goal of the Coalition’s work is to establish a certification process that “provides healthcare administrators and providers with a valid and credible certification system that can guarantee the quality of interpreter services for their limited English proficient patient population.” The expectation is also to garner increased respect for the healthcare interpreting profession, and to help skilled healthcare interpreters earn the compensation status they deserve,” Nguyen added.

“Skilled professional interpreters have left the health care setting due to low working conditions and there is a general shortage of interpreters in many hospitals. Hopefully certification will attract more interpreting professionals back into the health care setting,” says Izabel Arocha, President, IMIA.

Virginia Pérez-Santalla of the ATA underscored that healthcare providers and employers will benefit from certification “because they can be assured that they will receive interpreting services provided in a professional, knowledgeable, and impartial manner thus streamlining the interpreting process and reducing costly mistakes.”

The Coalition’s formation will channel the growing momentum toward certification, which results from the growing legal, industry, and consumer pressure to ensure adequate quality in the language services provided to the millions of Americans who have difficulty communicating in English when receiving healthcare services. Language barriers in the delivery of care have been repeatedly shown to result in poorer diagnoses, poorer treatment compliance, poorer health outcomes, greater medical error, and higher risk for facilities and insurers.

“The time has come for all organizations to support national certification to ensure that linguistically diverse patients are served by competent and qualified medical interpreters, no matter which state they live in,” said Arocha.

One of the main benefits of a national certification is the potential sharing and leveraging of localized certification efforts activities. Currently, only Washington State has a fully implemented statewide healthcare interpreting certificate, which is required of interpreters who provide language assistance to enrollees and beneficiaries in government health programs.

National certification will cover interpreters who move or work in more than one state via remote interpreting. State health department certifications cannot ensure quality of interpreting provided remotely, via phone or video interpreting as interpreters are working remotely from many different states. National certification will provide one nationwide benchmark.

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