



pacificinterpreters

We understand.

Frequently Asked Questions: Joint Commission Language Services Requirements

The following questions are frequently asked by our healthcare customers regarding our healthcare interpreting services and address specific Joint Commission standards and areas in which language services could significantly impact quality of care and patient safety.

- 1. How does Pacific Interpreters assure the confidentiality of patient information and Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance?** *(RI.2.130, EP1 – Patient Information is kept Confidential; IM.2.20, EP1-8 – The organization provides safeguards to information and the integrity of that information.)*

The security of customer and patient information is paramount at Pacific Interpreters. Confidentiality and HIPAA compliance are addressed in several documents that all of our employees and contractors receive and sign. The Pacific Interpreters Confidentiality Pledge; the Code of Ethics; and the Quality of Service and Behavior Guidelines are all discussed in detail during the initial orientation session and signed by each employee and contractor. Additionally, telephone interpreters are evaluated on their compliance with each of these policies throughout their tenure with us. Samples of each of these documents can be made available to customers upon request.

Pacific Interpreters adheres to the requirements of the HIPAA and Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) for protecting and storing protected health information (PHI). Our processes are reviewed for compliance and effectiveness on an ongoing basis. All information that is collected during the telephone call is stored on HIPAA-compliant hardware and software at our corporate headquarters in Portland, Oregon. All interpreters are required to shred any notes taken during an interpretation at the end of the encounter.

In addition, a Business Associate Agreement is provided as an Addendum to every service agreement to address the management of documentation required under HIPAA. All contractor interpreters are required to sign a HIPAA compliance Business Associate Agreement as well.

- 2. Does Pacific Interpreters perform background checks on all prospective employees and contractors?** *(HR.01.02.05 The hospital verifies staff qualifications, EP 1- EP 6.)*

As part of the application process, Pacific Interpreters conducts a criminal background check prior to contracting with an interpreter or hiring a staff member. We currently contract with a global provider of pre-employment background checks and screening services to verify certain information provided by the applicant on the interpreter application. The background check verifies whether or not the applicant has a valid social security number (where applicable), home address, criminal record, and if they are a registered sex offender. Pacific Interpreters also expects applicants to provide one personal and two professional references.

3. How does Pacific Interpreters define and evaluate the competency of employee and contracted telephone interpreters? *(HR.01.02.01, EP 1 - The hospital defines staff qualifications specific to their job responsibilities. HR.01.06.01 Staff are competent to perform their responsibilities.)*

Our pre-qualification criteria include at least two (2) years of college education or formal interpreter training; prior interpreter testing or certification (where applicable); experience working in a healthcare setting; and a proven track record in professional performance.

We also utilize a pre-hire interview to determine whether a candidate is knowledgeable about the cultural beliefs and practices of the groups to which their patients would likely belong. Our recruitment staff are trained and coached to identify candidates who are knowledgeable about and have a desire to work with culturally and racially diverse populations. The majority of interpreters hired have been raised in a culture other than the dominant culture and have personally experienced the differences that arise based on nationality and ethnicity as well as from family background and individual differences. Equally important, the candidate's attitude must indicate respect for the patient's minority culture, diverse heritage and acculturation experiences, as well as customer service skills and a desire to help others.

Language-specific interpreter skills assessments are administered for each candidate and include an evaluation of language proficiency in at least 2 languages, language conversion skills, knowledge of industry standards, understanding of the Code of Ethics, and knowledge of medical and healthcare-related terminology. Only candidates who achieve an above-average score are ultimately considered for work with us.

Quality assurance specialists monitor interpreters using a rating tool which evaluates accuracy, completeness and transparency. Cultural issues which are not conveyed accurately would be assessed under accuracy of the interpretation, e.g., interpreter did not provide "meaning for meaning" interpretation, or act effectively as a cultural broker, which hindered communication or confused the patient and provider. Currently, language and culture-specific monitoring takes place for: Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Somali, Arabic, Turkish, and Japanese (for more information see response to question 6).

4. What interpreter training is required and/or provided by Pacific Interpreters? *(HR.01.04.01 The hospital provides orientation to staff. HR.01.05.03 EP 1 Staff participate in ongoing education and training to maintain or increase their competency.)*

Our interpreter resources department focuses its recruitment efforts on interpreters who have successfully completed formal interpreter training. Currently, over 75% of our hired interpreters have had some form of prior interpreter training. Typically, these interpreter training programs last 40 hours and cover the code of ethics and decision-making practices; health care interpreting standards and role-playing exercises; memory retention and note-taking skills; and an overview of medical terminology including anatomy and physiology, pathophysiology, diagnosis and treatment, and nonmedical healthcare terminology (e.g. general accounting, insurance, etc.).

All interpreters are required to attend an interpreter orientation prior to beginning their work with us that includes an overview of Pacific Interpreters standards of practice which mirror the healthcare interpreting industry and company-specific policies which include observing patient privacy and confidentiality provisions (for more information see response to question 1).

- 5. Does Pacific Interpreters require completion of continuing education by its interpreters?** *(HR.01.05.03 EP 1 Staff participate in ongoing education and training to maintain or increase their competency.)*

Pacific Interpreters encourages contractors to undergo continuing education and recommends at least twelve (12) hours of independent continuing education per year. Information on training resources and opportunities are disseminated to all interpreters and administrative staff through our monthly newsletter which addresses issues of quality assurance, customer satisfaction, and trends and current events in the field of healthcare interpreting.

- 6. What measures of quality assurance are in place at Pacific Interpreters?** *(PI.03.01.01 The hospital improves performance, EP1 - EP4. LD.04.03.09, EP 4—Leaders monitor contracted services by establishing expectations for the performance of the contracted services.)*

In addition to the training requirements, routine monitoring allows highly trained quality assurance specialists the opportunity to continuously evaluate the services being provided by all of our interpreters. Interpreters are evaluated on language and conversion skills, customer service, and interpreter skills. Interpreter skills include use of proper interpreting techniques to facilitate transparent communication between provider and patient, and observance of interpreting standards (such as observance of the code of ethics regarding patient confidentiality, non-judgmental attitude, and withdrawing appropriately when the skills required for the session are not adequately met by the interpreter).

Monitoring results are recorded in a database and analyzed regularly by quality assurance, recruiting and scheduling staff. Our quality assurance, testing and contracts staff are involved in reviewing interpreter data on whether contractors are providing the level of service that Pacific interpreters requires of its contractors in order to continue a contractual arrangement.

- 7. Does Pacific Interpreters provide any tools to assist in identifying the patient's preferred language for their healthcare communication?** *(PC.02.02.01 The hospital coordinates the patient's care, treatment, and services based on the patient's needs, PC.02.03.01 The hospital provides patient education and training based on each patient's needs and abilities. RI.01.01.03 The hospital respects the patient's right to receive information in a manner he or she understands.)*

Language identification tools which can be used to identify 98% of the languages we encounter nationwide are provided to all of our customers upon request and at no charge. If, for any reason, a customer's employees are unable to identify the patient's preferred language using the language identification tools, live customer service agents are standing by 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and are highly skilled in identifying languages and dialects.

- 8. Does Pacific Interpreters offer training for our staff?** *(HR.01.05.03 Staff participate in ongoing education and training. LD.03.04.01 The hospital communicates information related to safety and quality to those who need it, including staff, licensed independent practitioners, patients, families, and external interested parties.)*

As part of our implementation process, a Pacific Interpreters account manager will work with customers to prepare a custom implementation plan for their organization. Training on how to access an interpreter, how to connect with a 3rd party, and how to work effectively through an interpreter can be provided to hospital leadership and to any and all departments and clinics. Training can be supplemented with additional information that your organization would like to

include (such as regulatory requirements, guidelines, and any hospital-specific policies or procedures that apply to use or provision of language support services).

- 9. Is Pacific Interpreters able to collect and report basic call information?** *(RC.01.01.01 The hospital maintains complete and accurate medical records. EP 13 The hospital assembles or makes available in a summary in the medical record all information required to provide patient care, treatment, and services. LD.03.02.01 The hospital uses data and information to guide decisions and to understand variation in the performance of processes supporting safety and quality.)*

Monthly usage reports in spreadsheet format and access to real-time online reporting are available to every customer, at no additional cost. Monthly usage reports can be customized to meet each organization's needs, but generally include data such as date and time of the call, interpreter identification number, language needed, duration of the call and connection times. Monthly reports give administrators the significant data needed to effectively monitor demographic trends; identify specific departments that may benefit from additional resources, equipment or training; and evaluate vendor performance and staff satisfaction. The use of live customer service agents allows us to customize data collection to meet your reporting needs.

Each time your staff calls Pacific Interpreters, they will be given the identification number for the assigned interpreter. Noting the interpreter's ID number in the patient's medical record is one way of documenting use of a trained, qualified medical interpreter to communicate during the encounter.

- 10. Is Pacific Interpreters able to assist our organization with in-language patient satisfaction surveys, cultural awareness training, regulatory compliance consulting or any other efforts to improve the services we provide our LEP community?** *(LD.03.05.01 Leaders implement changes in existing processes to improve the performance of the hospital. PI.01.01.01 The hospital collects data to monitor its performance.)*

Pacific Interpreters Account Managers can connect you with resources for a wide array of services related to language access. While not all of the solutions are provided directly by Pacific Interpreters, our customers benefit from our collectively broad network of colleagues in healthcare language access from across the nation.