

Interpreters: How often and why do they change what a genetic counselor says?

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Due to the growing population of non-English speaking individuals in the United States population, there has been a noted increase in the need for medically trained interpreters within the health care system. Past research has shown that language and cultural differences between clinicians and patients often lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications. Interpreters' primary role in the medical field is to reduce the incidences of these miscommunications as much as possible while remaining a neutral participant in sessions. Since the interpreters typically have the highest understanding of both the language and social dynamics of the clinician and patient, they are a valuable resource for understanding patient-clinician relationships. This study is designed to assess, through the use of a survey, how often miscommunications occurred in a prenatal genetic counseling session, and to identify the words, phrases or topics that lead to miscommunications. The survey includes both multiple-choice questions to gather quantitative data and open-ended responses to provide qualitative reasoning. The survey is being distributed from February 2007 until September 2007 in the Antenatal Testing Unit at Boston Medical Center. At this point in the study there has been low enrollment (23.8% response rate) which has impaired the collection of data. Through discussion with study staff and experts, as well as detailed literature review, multiple topics have been proposed as possible areas for future research. We are currently one-third of the way through our study and are hopeful that by extending our protocol we will be able to acquire more quantitative data to support our proposed theories.