

Terminology:

Interpreter – is someone who “interprets” the spoken word.

Interpretation refers to face-to-face or telephone interpreting.

Translator – is someone who changes the written word from one language to another.

Translation refers to changing the language or a written document to another.

Why is it important to provide an interpreter?

A trained interpreter will help you communicate with your patient who:

- speaks little or no English
- is Deaf and uses British Sign Language (BSL)
- is Deafblind

An interpreter will assist you:

- get an accurate and complete medical history
- explain the treatment you are recommending
- gain the trust and confidence of your patient

It will also:

- lead to less communication errors or barriers
- help patients understand their diagnosis, condition and treatment
- give the patient an opportunity to tell you what they think or feel
- lead to better patient experience

Can a family or friend be used as an interpreter?

It is not recommended to use untrained interpreters such as family, friend or carers because they:

- may not have the language skills (i.e. fluency in both languages)
- may not be aware of basic interpreting rules and confidentiality
- may struggle with complex clinical information
- or the patient may not feel comfortable in discussing sensitive and personal information

Some patients may refuse an interpreter, but you need to explain to the patient why it is good practice to use trained interpreters.

Can staff be used as an interpreter?

It is not recommended to rely or use staff, reasons as above. However, staff who are bilingual or who can sign, may be able to provide provisional communication support in an emergency situation or giving simple (non-clinical) information.

In special or extra ordinary circumstances, you may have to make a decision to use staff, patient's family or friend on a one-off or emergency situation. Ensure this is noted in the patient record and arrange for a trained interpreter as soon as possible.

Translation

Translation of written information such as patient leaflets, patient letter or medical records can be arranged/provided, as needed.

Other formats can also be arranged such as large print, Braille, audio, easy read and BSL videos.

There are a number of translated resources available on the NHS Inform website

[Translations | NHS inform](#)

You can get advice on translation and accessible formats from the NHSG Equality and Diversity Team on 01224 551116 or email: gram.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot

Other resources can be found on the [Equality and Diversity Intranet Page](#)

- Good Practices on Working with Interpreters
- NHS Scotland Interpretation and Translation National Policy
- Interpreting Guidelines for staff of NHS Scotland

More information

For information on how to request an interpreter or translation, please go to the NHS Grampian Intranet page Equality and Diversity [Equality and Diversity](#) or email gram.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot

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July 2025