

## The role and value of professional medical interpreters in the post-COVID-19 world

Source: <https://commed.umassmed.edu/blog/2020/06/24/role-and-value-professional-medical-interpreters-post-covid-19-world>

Imagine you were learning how to use a parachute, but your instructor spoke a different language. Since there isn't any room for error, you probably would choose to have clear instructions given in a language you understand.

The same is true for health care services. If you were dealing with a severe illness, you would want your diagnosis fully explained in a language you understand, along with details on how to follow the prescribed treatment to ensure your full and safe recovery.

This example speaks to the critical role and responsibility of medical interpreters.

Approximately 1 in 10 working adults in the United States has limited English-language proficiency<sup>1</sup>. And roughly 15% of American adults age 18+ (more than 37.5 million people) have some difficulty hearing<sup>2</sup>. For these millions of people, visiting a health care provider and not having access to a professional medical interpreter is like receiving skydiving instruction in a foreign language.

The use of medical interpreters in encounters with health care providers improves compliance and clinical outcomes and reduces disparities in access to quality health care services. It is also the law. Part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other subsequent legislation, require providers who receive federal funds to offer "meaningful access" to health care services so that patients can make informed decisions regarding their treatment.

Many health care providers, though, provide interpreter services through informal or ad hoc means. They rely on a staff member or a member of the patient's family to translate and answer questions about potentially complex diagnoses or procedures. The risk is that important details are left out or misunderstood, with potentially hazardous consequences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for qualified, professional medical interpreters. On any typical day, hospitals are inherently stressful environments. But the conditions of working during the pandemic—where high volumes of critically ill patients increase noise

levels and the risk for delays, and where patients may be intubated and, therefore, unable to communicate—make timely, effective communications even more critical.

At the same time, the pandemic, with its extreme risk for disease transmission, highlights the critical need and the value of trained professional medical interpreters, who are well-versed in universal precautions and infection control protocols.

In addition to possessing the highest degree of language fluency, medical interpreters also have a thorough understanding of medical terminology, diagnoses and treatments. They are trained to "read the moment," so they know when to be transparent (i.e., provide word-for-word translation) and when to step forward to assist with forming questions and interpreting answers. And they are familiar with laws and regulations regarding privacy and reimbursement.

But perhaps the essential skill for a professional medical interpreter is the high degree of cultural knowledge and sensitivity they bring to their work. The interpreter's ability to accurately read non-verbal communication and cues—gestures, posture, energy rooted in culture or nationality—is crucial to helping the patient and provider fully understand each other. And, in this way, reduces the risks associated with misunderstanding a diagnosis or a treatment plan.

A medical interpreter's training, knowledge, and cultural sensitivity removes emotional bias and helps reduce the trauma and anxiety of the situation. It helps build trust between the patient and their family and their physicians or care team. And because they help improve compliance with prescription and treatment plans, they also help reduce the risk for more extended hospital stays and adverse outcomes and, therefore, help reduce the cost of care and the risk of litigation.

In the post-COVID-19 world, where telehealth services will be far more prevalent—possibly the rule, rather than the exception—medical interpreters will also possess the technical skills to integrate their services into any electronic medium seamlessly. And to do so in any setting, whether it is a hospital, doctor's office, the courts, or a conference.



### October 2022 Calendar

National Breast Cancer Awareness Month  
Emotional Wellness Month

- 2-8 – Mental Illness Awareness Week (US)
- 4 – St. Francis Day (Christianity)
- 5 – World Teachers' Day
- 8 – Milad an-Nabi (Islam)
- 10 – Sukkot (Juddaism)
- 10 – World Inclusion Day
- 13 – Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day (US)
- 19 –Day of Unity (International)
- 21 – National Mammography Day (US)
- 26 – Lung Health Day (US)
- 24 – Diwali (Sikh, Hindu, Jain)
- 28 – Chhath Puja (Hindu)
- 31 – Halloween (International)

## Emotional Wellness Month – October 2022

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/emotional-wellness-month/>

Did you know your emotional well-being has powerful effects on your overall health? Mental and emotional stress can translate into negative physical reactions, a weakened immune system, and poor health

“Emotional wellness” refers to our ability to process feelings in a healthy, positive way and manage the stress of everyday life. If you feel stressed or overwhelmed, try a soothing activity like meditation or yoga to slow down and clear your mind.

Use Emotional Wellness Month as an opportunity to take charge of your emotional

### HISTORY OF EMOTIONAL WELLNESS MONTH

With our hectic schedules, devices pinging us from every direction, and modern life becoming increasingly uncertain, it’s more crucial than ever to maintain a sense of calm and balance. Emotional Wellness Month, observed all October, reminds us to disconnect and take a time out for our brain.

Maintaining a healthy emotional balance helps us make healthy choices, have good relationships, and achieve our goals. Emotional wellness gives us a toolkit for handling life’s stresses, navigating relationships, and keeping ourselves motivated. Mindfulness, a simple but powerful concept inspired by Eastern meditation traditions, is a useful way to practice engaging in the present, accepting events and feelings without judgment, and moving through life with calm and ease.

Did you know good sleep and a healthy diet can have powerful effects on your emotions? If you’re feeling depressed or anxious, make sure you’re getting proper rest and eating nutritious food. Consider your relationship to yourself and your loved ones. Do you feel confident and optimistic about your future? Do you have good communication with those you care about? Are you able to express your feelings and process difficult times in a healthy way?

High levels of stress can lead to physical complications like high blood pressure, headaches, and even chronic conditions like diabetes. If you’re having a hard time enjoying life or experiencing the physical symptoms of high stress, talk to your doctor or a therapist who can guide you toward activities and treatment options that can help you feel like yourself again.



## New Staff Profile: Sura Abbas

Sura is the newest Arabic interpreter to the UC Davis medical interpreting team. Sura was born in Iraq, where she graduated from Al-Mustansiriya University college of medicine, and moved to the United States in 2016.

Sura’s medical knowledge and devotion to patient care, led her to begin interpreting for her family and friends. Always taking the time to clearly, and thoroughly interpreting their medical situation into their native tongue, Sura has always felt a thrill when using her language skills to bridge communication between limited English speakers and medical providers. Sura is a firm believer that engaging patients in their own health decision will always improve their health outcome, and help ease their suffering.

In 2017, Sura worked as a volunteer at UC Davis Medical Center, where she was fascinated by the positive and the productive environment. Sura believes that everyone at UC Davis feels valued and appreciated, making her passionate to continue being part of this empowering organization.

Today, Sura feels grateful to be part of the MIS family, and is delighted to serve the Arab-speaking community in Sacramento, especially the new immigrants from the war-torn countries.

In her free time, Sura enjoys practicing yoga, photography, cooking, and spending quality time with family and friends.

Welcome to the UCDH Medical Interpreting team, Sura!

