Proper use of an Interpreter during Psychotherapeutic Work

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Acknowledgement

The organization of this presentation's information draws from Rachel Casas, Ph.D., presentation *Neuropsychological Assessment via an Interpreter: Practical Issues and Precautions*

Disclaimer

- Interpreter use is not the best standard of care
- It should be used only when other options are not viable
- Data regarding interpreter use for psychological assessment is absent
Disclaimer
- Should be considered “food for thought” to help protect yourself and your patients
- General guidelines for working with adult clients
- Assumes work with professional interpreters

The Debate
- APA ethics code is ambiguous
- Strong and differing opinions in the field
- There is no empirical data
- Patients remain in need of services

Critical Considerations
- Is it an emergency situation?
- What is the referral question?
- What are the potential risks or consequences?
- What are the alternatives?
### Critical Considerations
- Is it a forensic case?
- Is a professional interpreter available?
- Is consultation or outside supervision available?
- Do you have adequate time and resources to devote to the case?

### Basic Preparation
- Seek expert consultation
- Conduct a thorough literature review
- Identify what, if any measures are available in the patient’s target language
- Determine whether or not appropriate normative data are available
- Request an interpreter
- Schedule a “pre-session” and “block book” future appointments
**Things to Avoid**

- Family members or friends as interpreters
- Bilingual staff as interpreters
- Telephone interpretation
- Leaving the interpreter alone with the patient

**Selecting an interpreter**

- Interpreter not the same as Translator
- Remember, the interpreter will often not have any training in mental health.
- Try to match gender and age of interpreter with that of client.
  - Unless the client makes specific request.
- Google “Interpreter [your city/state]” to locate an interpreter or agency nearby.
  - Don’t forget that the court system often have interpreters

**The Pre-Session**

- Preferably, not the same day as testing
- Explain the purpose of the evaluation
- Discuss the interpreter’s role
- Review issues of confidentiality
- Discuss dual relationships
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Pre-Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide interpreter with information about what to expect</td>
<td>- Review the purposes of each test carefully</td>
<td>- Discuss the mode of interpreting: consecutive vs simultaneous</td>
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<td>- Prepare the interpreter for sensitive questions or unusual behavior</td>
<td>- Provide time for site translations, if necessary</td>
<td>- Negotiate the style of interpreting: first-person, literal (if possible)</td>
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<td>- Establish emergency/safety protocols</td>
<td>- Demonstrate and practice administration of measures</td>
<td>- Determine the seating arrangement: triangle (unless using sign language or working with young children)</td>
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<td>- Introduce and explain any technical jargon or terminology</td>
<td>- Encourage the interpreter to model the patient’s affect/tone</td>
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### The Pre-Session
- Build rapport and help the interpreter feel confident and comfortable.
- Try to address stigma and attitudes toward mental health.
- Provide time and opportunities for questions/comments.

### Test Selection Considerations
- Battery will depend largely upon background preparation.
- Use a circumscribed/tailored battery.
- Familiarize yourself with administration and scoring procedures for new measures.
- Choose tests which minimize reliance on the interpreter.

### Test Selection Considerations
- Remember that patients may not be literate or familiar with the Latin alphabet.
- Try to include tasks with relatively "universal" and theory-driven foundations based on brain-behavior relationships.
- Be mindful that timed tests may present an additional challenge.
- May need to create your own qualitative/functional tasks.
The Client

- Ask client in what language they would prefer to conduct therapy/testing.
- Ask client for preference in gender and age of client.
  - Don't make any promises though.
- Rely on interpreters to help decide if there may be unforeseen cultural issues that will interfere with interpreters' ability to perform.
- Be mindful of how disempowering this experience can be.

Other Considerations

- Paperwork should be translated (e.g. confidentiality forms, fees, etc)
  - Preferably back translated as well

The Interview

- Allow double the usual time, at a minimum
- Interview the patient individually first
- Ask for permission to speak with caregivers/key informants separately
The Interview

- Introduce yourself to the patient first
- Next, introduce the interpreter and explain his/her role
- Review the limits of confidentiality
- Explain the "ground rules"
- Provide an opportunity for questions

The Interview

- Speak through the interpreter not to the interpreter
- Look directly at the patient
- Use simple language and short sentences (consecutive translation is probably best for "most" cases)
- Speak slower, not louder

The Interview

- Use an interview template with pre-planned questions (but be flexible)
- Pay close attention to behavioral and affective cues
- Monitor your level of focus and control to make sure you are really "listening" to your patient. It's harder to do with an interpreter
- Minimize side conversations
- Be patient and flexible
Testing

- Start at the beginning of every measure
- Do not apply discontinuation rules
- Interpreter should directly administer tests of verbal attention and memory in most cases (e.g. Digit Span, CVLT, etc.)
- Interpreter should record verbatim responses for as many tasks as possible
- Try to corroborate number of patient responses by using tallies (e.g. for verbal fluency, etc.)

Testing

- Check for patient understanding of task instructions (e.g., head nodding, facial expression, etc.)
- Ensure that the interpreter is paying attention at all times (e.g. not checking their cell phone, looking in another direction, etc.)
- Always observe the patient and keep notes about items that appear difficult to interpret/understand

Post-Session

- Meet with the interpreter to debrief after every appointment
- Discuss any issues that were identified as important during the pre-session
- Review each test and scoring criteria
- Compare your notes to the interpreter’s verbatim recordings, etc.
Post-Session

- Provide space for the interpreter to process any emotional reactions to the session
- Include opportunities for the interpreter to ask questions, provide suggestions, etc.
- Thank the interpreter and provide constructive feedback

Thank you

Questions? Please email: Alexander.Quiros@pearson.com

Or Call:
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