

Chair Barker and members of the committee,

I became a “medical interpreter” the day after Christmas in 2017 after a simple over the phone test after studying about 100 relatively basic medical terms. I was shocked it was this easy. I have since found out that I’m actually not supposed to be interpreting without certification but these requirements exist but are not polices by anyone.

On January 15th of 2018 I signed my contract with Telelanguage. Within the first two weeks I was sent to a five hour appointment that I could sense other interpreters were possibly avoiding. It was an interpretation for the preop and post-op for a hand and arm surgery and to be totally honest I completely winged it. Thankfully, I have a high level of mastery in both English and Spanish and since then have done my best to provide the best quality of interpretation that I can.

At first, I mostly did simple physical therapy appointments in Woodburn, Oregon, close to Canby, where my parents live, where I was living. To be honest, at this point I only saw this “job” as a way to get out of the house and make some extra money and wasn’t completely aware of how low my remuneration was for each form I turned in was compared to how much the agency was charging for each appointment.

I traveled for two months abroad and then came back and began to work a lot more and began to see more cases. Something I began to notice, were the amount of cases and misdiagnoses where certain patients were just being passed around and were in a lot of pain.

One of these patients was a young Mexican man that I helped for many consecutive appointments. He had had severe back pain for almost two years and no one could seem to figure out where it was coming from, to the point that when I interpreted for him it appeared that his back was better from his newer MRIs. This sadly is a case where I didn’t see any hope of improvement for the patient.

In another case, a man had been passed around for sometime between different clinics for an accident he had had after falling off a ladder and could no longer move one of his fingers. When I finally met him, he was expressing his frustration to me about how he felt like the doctors that had been treating him were not paying enough attention to his case and he was beginning to lose hope and he shared another frustration that many of the Spanish speakers share that many times they were very disappointed with the low quality of their interpreters and that often times they would prefer to brave the appointment on their own than have some of the interpreters they believed were jeopardizing their appointments.

With this man, from Hood River, who had fallen of the ladder after providing the best interpretation the doctor was able to figure out the problem, the MRI looked normal despite the fact that the man could not move his finger because his tendon had actually exploded to the point that it was no longer there.

After many months of having zero answers as to why he could not move his finger, a key appendage he needed to go back to work as a commercial painter he at least finally knew what was wrong.

I believe that a higher level of interpretation that I provided helped the doctor and the patient communicate and also allow the doctor to do his job to solve a difficult and elusive problem.

These are only a couple of the anecdotes that most strongly come to mind when I think about this bill. I was not very involved in this effort to help interpreters organize and collectively bargain, but the more I think about it and hear stories from other interpreters about how we are not being fairly compensated makes me think it's imperative that this bill for collective bargaining goes through.

I believe the most important reason is to continue to raise the bar in the interpreting profession for seamless interpretation to be the standard so that patients and health care professionals who can't understand each other's languages can through the help of interpreters that are getting the support they need find solutions to their delicate health care problems.