



Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association

Cumann Aistritheoirí agus Teangairí na hÉireann

Submission of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters'

Association to the End-of-Life Forum

Irish Hospice Foundation

18th February 2009

The Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association/Cumann Aistritheoirí agus Teangairí na hÉireann (ITIA)

The ITIA was founded in 1986 and is a not-for profit organisation. It is the only professional association in Ireland representing the interests of practising translators and interpreters. The ITIA aims to promote the highest standards within the profession and to foster an understanding among translator and interpreter clients of the highly-skilled and exacting nature of the profession. Our individual members hail from many countries and cultures, reflecting the multi-cultural nature of Ireland today and providing a wide range of language combinations to meet the exponential increase in the demand for translation and interpreting services. In addition to providing guidance to our translator and interpreter members the ITIA acts in an advisory capacity to Government bodies, NGOs, the media and others involved in the provision of translation and interpreting services to the general public.

The ITIA would like to make the following submission which addresses the provision of interpreters in end of life situations.

In recent years Ireland has experienced a rapid increase in immigration from all around the world. Unfortunately it is inevitable that some of these people will fall ill and find themselves in need of hospice care. Not all immigrants are proficient in English and even those who are may well prefer to use their first language when they are sick.

Our first concern is that people in this situation may not be aware of the existence of hospices and may experience difficulty in accessing this very important service.

When people with limited English are admitted to a hospice we are concerned that the language barrier could lead to difficulties which would exacerbate an already difficult situation. It is very important for people to be able to communicate their needs. For example, last December Australian newspaper *The Age* highlighted issues for elderly migrants. These centred around communication and inability to communicate their needs in particular concerning food.¹

Very often when there is a language barrier the most convenient solution is to ask a family member to act as interpreter. In some cases young children are asked to interpret. However, there can be difficulties with this solution because family members may filter information to protect the patient or may speak on behalf of the patient. The difficulties associated with coping with a terminally ill relative may be exacerbated by the need to act as interpreter.

The other most commonly used convenient solution is to ask medical, nursing, catering staff or porters to act as interpreters. While it makes a lot of sense for a Polish doctor for example to deal with a Polish patient in Polish, it is not always a good idea to ask a Polish doctor or another Polish speaker to act as interpreter for other staff. This is because untrained ad hoc interpreters may summarise information instead of interpreting everything that is said and may become personally involved.

¹ <http://www.theage.com.au/national/elderly-migrants-going-hungry-in-homes-20081218-71nh.html>

We believe that there is a place for trained interpreters who are sensitive to the particular needs of the hospice situation and can provide a professional service.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- ❖ Information on the Hospice Movement be made available in key languages on your website.
- ❖ Ad hoc interpreters such as family, friends, children, medical and ancillary staff not be asked to interpret.
- ❖ Professional interpreters who adhere to the ITIA Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters be hired. The key ethical aspects are neutrality, accuracy and confidentiality.

We are also sending you the ITIA Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters.

Annette Schiller, Chairperson

Mary Phelan, PRO Officer