

Testimony on the value of in person interpretive services in Oregon workers compensation cases.

Submitted by John DiPaola, M.D.
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STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL IMPACT

Effective interpretation results in more appropriate causation decisions, facilitates prompt treatment, mitigates return to work issues, and enables effective claims management in workers whose language and culture may otherwise negatively impact outcomes. The cost of making an appropriate fee adjustment for interpretation services will be more than offset by the financial benefits of more effective case management and reduced medical costs.

TESTIMONY

In my 25 year experience of providing medical and surgical services to the injured workers of Oregon, the critical value of accurate in person interpretive services has grown exponentially. During this time there has been a marked increase in the number of non-English speaking workers who present for care relating to a workplace accident. The value of accurate, culturally appropriate interpretation to explain complex medical problems, the principles of causation and apportionment, and the influence of the workers compensation rules in qualifying for medical treatment is beyond measure.

If a patient is not presented with accurate, culturally appropriate interpretation with a professional interpreter (instead of a friend or family member who may not accurately translate the exact statements made by the health care provider) they are much more likely not to respond to treatment and not to make appropriate decisions about their care. Even if a worker has limited grasp of conversational English, there are situations where I have insisted on professional interpretation to be certain that they understand the nuances of MEDICAL English. Failure of patients to clearly understand the risks and benefits of treatment presents a liability to medical providers, especially where higher risk situations are present.

There are two other critically important services that magnify the positive impact of professional interpreters: that they appear IN PERSON and that to the extent possible, FOLLOW THE PATIENT to all of their appointments with the various care providers the worker may be referred to. In our practice, it has been extremely valuable for interpreters to give accurate feedback regarding events surrounding physical therapy, work hardening, sub-specialists, and diagnostic testing appointments.

It should also be noted that the interpreters often engage in conversations in the waiting room and after they step out of the office (after they have signed out and are no longer “on the clock,”) because of their commitment to helping the patient understand “how the system

works” and to maintain a helpful, friendly relationship with the worker – and sometimes their family members.

In addition, the interpreters often have to travel across town between appointments which used to be easy to do. All of us who live in Oregon know that getting from place to place is no longer quick or easy. I have had to change the business model of my practice to opening several offices in geographically diverse locations in order to provide the same volume of services that were previously possible with a single location.

We've also noted that this situation evolves into having a limited group (a family if you will) of interpreters who provide the information needed to provide the best care to our patients. They often help with arranging appointments, follow-ups, and administrative issues on the phone on an as needed basis. These impromptu needs for their services go uncompensated. The interpreters feel a connection to the workers and do not hesitate to go the extra mile trying to make “the system” work for them

Having been a small business owner, the impact of the relentlessly increasing cost of living on the viability of our company is all too familiar. In today's economic environment of record high inflation, disproportionate increases in fuel prices for our cars and homes, and the issues of maintaining a “high touch” business during a pandemic are exerting extreme pressure on interpretation businesses. They are long overdue for a fee increase to preserve their viability and to ensure that the Workers' Compensation stakeholders will continue to reap the return on investment for their services.

The worst possible financial impact on the Workers' Compensation system would be for these intelligent, personable, dedicated people who braved the risks of the pandemic, to feel unappreciated or financially unable to continue their good works and decide to dedicate their talents and bilingual abilities to benefit another segment of the workforce.