

CARLOS GARCIA TRANSCRIPT

Segment 1 – Introduction/Personal Background

>> **CARLOS:** My name is Carlos Garcia. I am from Nicaragua. I went through the health care interpreter program at City College of San Francisco. Since then I've become certified as a medical interpreter, a nationally certified medical interpreter. I'm currently working out of San Francisco.

I had a health care problem in 2002; it was cancer, brain cancer. I was on the road to becoming a lawyer in Nicaragua, that wasn't meant to be. While I was going for treatment at San Mateo Medical Center, I had a bedside patient right next to me - my neighbor. He was a limited English proficient patient. We both had the same doctor and it just so happened and he needed an interpreter. I was in my bed ready to receive treatment and I said well somebody needs to help him.

So I started doing "over the curtain" interpreting, as opposed to over the phone interpreting, which is a very common profession nowadays. The doctor was OK with it, but then he felt awkward. It was not proper to do that and so he decided to call the staff interpreter, and they went ahead and called a dual role interpreter, that is an interpreter, who is there mainly for some other function, could be a janitor or receptionist or could be a nurse as well. In that case it was a janitor from the hospital. But the rendition of the interpretation itself was not good. I said to myself - this can't be happening. This is something you expect in the Third World, it can't be happening in the US. That's what motivated me to do this.

Segment 2 – What Does It Take?

>> **CARLOS:** For healthcare interpreting it has to be someone compassionate, you need to be able to feel what the patient is feeling and to convey that information to the provider. But you also need to facilitate communication so if the patient is breaking down, you cannot break down with them because then the patient doesn't get any help.

They need to love what they are doing, they need to love linguistics, they need to love cultural advocacy and be fluent in both languages. So for an ESL student, it won't take one year to learn English; it will take several years to be fully bicultural. It entails knowing a lot about medical terminology, that is why you have to go through training,

and learn medical terminology, not exactly how to translate specific terms, though that will come later. But at first you need to know what the doctor is talking about. If he says renal failure, you are supposed to know that it is something to do with the kidneys and not the liver, and you also need cultural awareness – you have to be bilingual and bicultural. You need to understand the bio-medical culture, but you also need to understand the culture where the patient is coming from.

Segment 3 – Requirements and Qualifications

>> **CARLOS:** I enrolled in City College of San Francisco. They have a healthcare interpreter's certificate program which is a one year program. So you apply, and in your cover letter, you try to convince them to take you into the program. It is a very hard program to get into, but it is a very good program. It will give you 15 college credits. If you do decide to continue studying to get your associate degree, then you will have 15 credits. One of the requirements is to be over 18 years old and to have a high school diploma. It could be in your country.

Currently there are about 300 active hours of learning while you are in school. The minimum requirement nationwide is 40 hours. Once you are there, you are with, in my case, 17 other Spanish speakers. And then in my group there were Russian interpreters and Mandarin interpreters. The semester is split into two classes. One class is general instructions, regulations, protocols - ways to interact with the provider, with the patient, how to interact, to manage the flow of information. Then there is the second part, the language lab. You are there with the coach. They train you how to manage the flow and you do role play. You practice a lot with your fellow students. One is the patient and the other a provider, so you start to get the hang of how it is done.

After you are done with the instruction and the coaching, they send you to an internship program. That could be at Kaiser, San Francisco or Richmond, Fremont, St Francis in San Francisco, Stanford to do a practicum. The first few sessions you are shadowed by another professional interpreter, just to make sure that you did learn the right way to do it and then after that, it is all you. You have a lot of practice with an experienced interpreter behind you just to oversee the whole process.

Segment 4 – What Working Options Are There?

There are two options that you have as an interpreter. You could either be an employee of a healthcare facility that could be a hospital, clinic or community center. Or you could be a contractor. I am a contractor. In that case you work for clinics, for individual doctors only, or entire hospitals. You work for workers compensation cases and then some other people might call on you to interpret for them.

The first thing you should do is go to your local hospital or healthcare faculties and see if they have openings. If they don't, then there is always the possibility of being a freelancer, an independent contractor, and for that there is a sea of agencies out there you can probably Google it – language service providers or interpreting agencies – Google will give you a whole list of them.

Translation is another venue to explore. As a translator the fact that you are a certified medial interpreter, gives them a little bit more confidence in what you are doing. You can also go to pharmaceutical companies or hospitals, clinics, or dental offices. They need to advertise to communicate with their patients and need to translate their brochures and marketing information. There is another one - that is transcriptions for court, for evidence, for audio files that need to be transcribed. Now you don't need to be a certified court interpreter to work in that field; you do need to work with a certified court interpreter.

Segment 5 - Would You Recommend This Work?

>> **CARLOS:** I would be there at the hospital laying in my bed while taking my chemotherapy and I would be thinking - what am I going to do after this? I was designing a plan as to how to go about interpreting and using my language to help people. And since then it has been non stop, like somebody is chasing me and I need to get things done. It is a field that I would recommend. It is coming up. The demand for language services is rising, according to the Department of Labor. There is high demand and it will be even more so in the next ten years. But right now there is plenty of work for you to do. I am busy all day long.

You just need to think how you can use your language skills to work. That is something that ESL students don't fully realize. They think as long as you can speak English, you can get a job at a store, supermarket, or as an office clerk, but that's not entirely correct. You could get those jobs and having the ability to speak more than one language will give you better pay, and make you more attractive to hire, but the fact is you can find jobs out there, that just require you to have two languages, and so being fully proficient in two languages, Spanish and English, Mandarin and Cantonese or Russian is a big advantage.

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