Everyday ethical challenges for healthcare interpreters

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A Code of Ethics is “a set of principles or values that govern the conduct of members of a profession while they are engaged in the enactment of that profession. It provides guidelines for making judgements about what is acceptable and desirable behavior in a given context or in a particular relationship.” (NCIHC, 2002)
## Rules vs. Guidelines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethics as rules</th>
<th>Ethics as guidelines</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Reflects a view of interpreting as a <strong>technical profession</strong></td>
<td>* Reflects a view of interpreting as a <strong>practice profession</strong></td>
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<td>* Focuses on <strong>learning the rules</strong></td>
<td>* Focuses on <strong>learning the principles</strong> behind the rules and <strong>how to apply them</strong></td>
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<td>* Less useful to practicing interpreters, but <strong>needed as a starting point</strong>?</td>
<td>* More useful to practicing interpreters, but takes time to develop <strong>professional judgement</strong></td>
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*Taken from Cynthia E. Roat, MPH
Ethical principles

- Confidentiality
- Accuracy
- Impartiality
- Respect
- Cultural awareness
- Role boundaries
- Professional development
- Act in a professional and ethical manner
- Advocacy
Confidentiality: Interpreters treat as confidential, within the treating team, all information learned in the performance of their professional duties, while observing relevant requirements regarding disclosure.

Accuracy: Interpreters strive to render the message accurately, conveying the content and spirit of the original message, taking into consideration the cultural context.
Impartiality: Interpreters strive to maintain impartiality and refrain from counseling, advising, or projecting personal biases or beliefs.

Respect: Interpreters treat all parties with respect.

Cultural awareness: Interpreters strive to develop awareness of the cultures encountered in the performance of interpreting duties.
Role boundaries: The interpreter maintains the boundaries of the professional role, refraining from personal involvement.

Professionalism: Interpreters at all times act in a professional and ethical manner.
Professional development: Interpreters strive to further their knowledge and skills, through study, continuing education, and actual interpreting practice.

Advocacy: When the patient’s health, well-being or dignity is at risk, an interpreter may be justified in acting as an advocate.
The Code of Ethics is based on three core values:
- Beneficence,
- Fidelity,
- Respect for the importance of culture and cultural differences.

These values are a set of ideals that embody the essence of the interpreter’s relation with the patient and the provider.
Discuss one principle in each group.
Consider: what is the rule?
• What is the purpose of the rule?
• How can the rule be applied?
A healthcare interpreter has the unique position in a triadic encounter as the only one who understands what each party is saying to each other, and the relevant cultural context for each.

Framing his actions within the requirements of the Code allows for a balanced, fair and informed decision on how to proceed.
GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Split into groups of 5.
2. Discuss assigned case.
3. Consider ethical principles and values.
4. What would you do?

1. Large group discussion
2. Fifteen minute break
Decision-Making Tool for Healthcare Interpreters*

1. State the issue
2. Determine the urgency

*Taken from NCIHC presentation: Challenges in Standards of Practice
ACT NOW

Consider risks & benefits

Make a decision

Formulate plan of action

ACT LATER

Think and consult

Let it go
Implement

Inform supervisor

Evaluate
ONE

State the problem taking into account values, ethics, and standards of practice.

Consider interpreter’s personal opinions, biases, experiences

Institutional policies

Individual contributions of each participant
TWO
Identify the urgency of the problem or issue, consider:

a. Level of risk to patient or staff member’s physical or emotional well-being
b. Patient autonomy
c. Who else should be informed
THREE
When action is needed (immediate or delayed)
  a. Formulate possible plans of action
  b. Identify benefits and risks
  c. Choose best plan of action
  d. Identify person with decision-making authority, discuss issue in clear and professional way
If you **DON’T NEED** to act immediately,

a. Consider situation carefully

b. Seek guidance from reliable person (i.e. your supervisor, nurse manager, senior interpreter)
GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Split into groups of 5.
2. Discuss assigned case.
3. Use the Decision Making Tool to decide what to do.

1. Large group discussion
* National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care

* A National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care
Additional Resources, cont.

Thank you!
Gracias!