

**INTERPRETING IN THE MENTAL HEALTH  
SETTING: IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS  
TO STRENGTHEN QUALITY AND  
CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES**

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**Introduction to Workshop**

**Purpose:**

- ▣ Equip interpreters to better serve clients in mental health setting
  
- ▣ Understand difference between interpreting in mental health field vs. other service settings
  
- ▣ Assist providers/therapists to better partner with interpreters

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**Interpreting in Mental Health  
Setting**

- ▣ What are your own personal and/or cultural beliefs on mental health problems?
  
- ▣ Based on your experiences How does stigma impact mental health?
  
- ▣ What differences have you experienced interpreting in mental health vs. other settings?
  
- ▣ What are some of the greatest challenges you have faced as an interpreter?

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### Impact of Personal and Cultural Beliefs on Mental Health Services

- Interpreter biases can negatively impact what and how information is communicated
  - Mental Health Stigma
  - Socioeconomic, ethnic and religious differences
  - Leaving out information due to uncertainty of relevance
  
- Interpreter is an incredible resource
  - Role of Cultural Broker

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### Impact of Stigma

- Ways Interpreter can help to decrease stigma
  - Restoration of dignity and respect
  
  - Reassuring and maintaining confidentiality
  
  - Strong professional boundaries

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### Challenges to developing TRUST



- Histories of ethnic, religious and political conflict
  - Mistrust, Division and Fear
  
- Close proximity of resettlement communities
  - Fear of community gossip
  
- Changing of interpreters in therapeutic relationship
  - Unable to continue services
    - vicarious trauma, need for higher hourly wage, conflict in schedules, etc.
  - Client must then rebuild trust with new interpreter
  - Greatly impacts therapeutic relationship and progress

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## Challenges to maintaining CONFIDENTIALITY

- Dual relationships of interpreters and providers
  - Interact with client in both clinic and community
  - May provide services to other family members, neighbors, friends or even enemies
- Waiting Room and Transport issues
  - Scheduling challenges to maintain confidentiality
    - Can increase anxiety of being identified in the community as being "sick" or "crazy"
    - On the other hand, can normalize experience



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## Client-Interpreter Relationship

- Critical to establish as part of therapeutic relationship
- Interpreter can bridge therapeutic trust from client to therapist
  - Impact of language in developing trust
  - Trust often first established with interpreter
  - Negative impact on therapeutic relationship if client does not establish trust with interpreter
- Client's "Love/Hate" relationship with interpreter
  - Dependency vs. Despair
  - Interpreter as Scapegoat



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## Client-Interpreter Relationship

- Interpreter is burdened with a lot of knowledge
  - Deep understanding of more than one language
  - Understanding of both cultures
  - Knowledge about client that therapist is not aware of
    - Strict guidelines prevent interpreter from sharing this information with therapist
  - Knowledge about what therapist is trying to do
  - Own thoughts and opinions about what is therapeutic
  - Unique skill set in addition to interpreter role



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### Different Roles and Expectations placed on Interpreters



- Difference between **Interpreter Role** vs. **Cultural Broker Role**
  - Interpretation does not provide cultural meaning
  - Culture is inherent to client
    - Creates need for interpreter to provide relevant cultural information that will strengthen services client receives
  - Encourage Interpreter to ask questions and alert you about potential cultural misunderstandings

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### Cultural Broker Role

- Cultural Broker Role
  - Ask permission to step into this role
  - Clarify when you are acting as cultural broker vs. interpreting what client said
  - Inform client of the need to provide cultural information to therapist
  - Interpreter intervening when therapist is making a mistake (culturally insensitive)
  - Therapist to trust interpreter judgment
- What is most important:
  - **BEST INTEREST OF CLIENT**

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### Different Roles and Expectations placed on Interpreters

- Importance of Interpreter maintaining boundaries and providers respecting Interpreter's Professional Boundaries
  - Providers asking interpreters to perform roles outside of their professional boundaries
    - Provide transport to client
    - Be responsible to coordinate services outside of clinic
  - Client asking interpreters to perform roles outside of professional boundaries
    - Pressure from community
    - Expectations placed upon interpreters



**Can lead to Burn Out...**

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### Differences of Interpreting in Mental Health Setting

- Therapist-Interpreter relationship
  - True Collaborative Experience
- Interpreter-Client relationship
  - Requires ability to maintain compassionate response while discovering your own boundaries
- Interpreter-Clinic relationship
  - Likelihood of interacting with various clients whom you know very critical and personal information
  - More collegial relationship
  - Most satisfied and successful are those who share the same passion and commitment to the clients

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### Impact of Vicarious Trauma

- Also known as:
  - Secondary Trauma
    - Cumulative impact client's personal stories of trauma have upon the listener
- Results in:
  - Compassion Fatigue
    - Gradual, lessening compassion over time
    - Long term psychological impact of working in caregiver professions
- Can lead to BURNOUT

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### Interpreters are at High Risk for Vicarious Trauma

- Those who have also survived trauma
- Unresolved personal issues of trauma, grief and loss
- Absorb trauma story
  - First to hear trauma
  - Hear and Interpret Trauma Story
    - Experience it TWICE!
  - Close emotional proximity to trauma story due to shared language, culture and/or country of origin
    - Close emotional proximity when using "First Person"
      - Encourage use of "third person" when interpreting trauma story to help interpreter separate themselves from client's story

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## Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

- Similar to symptoms of PTSD
  - ▣ Nightmares
  - ▣ Difficulty falling or staying asleep
  - ▣ Hypervigilance
  - ▣ Exaggerated startle response
  - ▣ Difficulty concentrating
  - ▣ Irritability
  - ▣ Sense of foreshortened future
  - ▣ Detachment from others
  - ▣ Avoidance of thoughts or stimulus that are related to trauma
  - ▣ Intrusive thoughts

DSM IV

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## Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

- Hopelessness
- Decrease in experience of pleasure
- Indifference and Detachment
- Increased, continual stress & anxiety
- Pervasive negative attitude
- Self-Doubt
- Conflict in professional and personal relationships
- Shame
- Sadness
- Numbness
- Survivor's Guilt

*Can lead to leaving the Profession...*

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## Coping Mechanisms

- Acknowledge and Accept:
  - ▣ "What I hear will affect me."
  - ▣ It is abnormal not to be affected
  - ▣ Acknowledge your own human response to trauma (DeVore, N.M)
- Be able to recognize early warning signs and symptoms

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## Coping Mechanisms

- Setting boundaries to maintain balanced life
  - Intentional about self-care
    - Emotional
      - Positive self talk, strong interpersonal relationships, quality time with friends and family, seek counseling when needed
    - Mental
      - Allow for mental energy to be used outside of work, relaxation exercises (deep breathing and guided imagery)

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## Coping Mechanisms

- Setting boundaries to maintain balanced life
  - Intentional about self-care
    - Physical
      - Eat right, exercise, adequate rest, take frequent breaks, massage, listen to your body!
    - Spiritual
      - Allow your spirituality to be a source of strength, comfort and rest e.g. prayer, meditation, nature, faith community, etc.

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## Things to Remember

- All helping professionals who serve trauma survivors are impacted by trauma.
- Anxiety, profound sadness, grief and anger are all normal reactions to abnormal events.
- You should expect to lose your balance from time to time. You are not invisible or infallible.

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## Things to Remember Cont.

- Acknowledging your feelings and well being helps you recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities helps you to heal.
- Asking for and accepting help is healthy!
- Ethical to put your well being before well being of client, if you are unable to resolve these issues
- Just as no survivor can recover alone, no helping professional can deal with trauma alone.

Devore, N.M.

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## Federal Law Regarding Providing Interpreters

- Title VI-Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - No recipient of federal funding may run its programs in a way that discriminates on the basis of race, color and country of origin
  - Equal access requires use of professional interpreters
  - Office of Civil Rights takes action against institutions who are out of compliance with Title VI by not providing linguistically appropriate care and/or are denying services to non-English speakers

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## How to work with an Interpreter

- Why is this important in mental health setting?
  - Working effectively with interpreter is critical in order to build and strengthen **therapeutic relationship** with client

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## How to work with an Interpreter

- Positioning of Interpreter
- Speak directly to Client
- Interpreter to speak in "First Person"
- Short segments/Pause so Interpreter can interpret
- Interpreter to interpret everything that is said
  - Concept for Concept NOT Word for Word interpretation
  - Also, many concepts have no linguistic or conceptual equivalent
    - Requires interpreter to paint word pictures which may take longer than your original speech

CCHCP

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## How to Work with an Interpreter

- Things to AVOID:
  - Highly idiomatic speech and euphemisms
  - Complicated sentence structure
  - Sentence fragments
  - Changing your idea in the middle of a sentence
  - Asking multiple questions at one time
  - Patronizing or Infantilizing client
    - Lack of EL skills is not a reflection of low cognitive function or lack of education

CCHCP

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## Interpreting in the "First Person"

- Why is it important?
  - Helping two other people to develop a trusting relationship
- What are the limitations?
  - Difficult for client to remember that interpreter is speaking for the therapist
    - Complicated by: psychosocial stressors, mental illness and unfamiliar structure
  - When interpreter feels uncomfortable using "I" for cultural reasons
  - When interpreter disagrees with something therapist has said to client
  - When interpreting trauma story
    - Encourage use of "third person" to reduce risk of vicarious trauma

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### How to Work with an Interpreter in the Best Interest of your Client

- Spend time with interpreter prior to counseling intake
  - Provide orientation to mental health setting
  - Review interpreter guidelines
  - Discuss need for both role as interpreter and cultural broker
  - Time well spent: rapport, clear communication, decreases potential dangerous cultural misunderstandings, and begins collaborative effort
- Take time to introduce interpreter and yourself to client
- Clarify role of interpreter to client
- Clarify expectations and boundaries
- Affirm rules of confidentiality for both yourself and interpreter to client

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### Impact of Therapist on Therapeutic Relationship

- Potentials for negative impact
  - Talking to the interpreter instead of client
  - Disrespecting the interpreter in front of the client (including non-verbal)
  - If therapist fails to create strong working relationship with interpreter:
    - Risks higher potentials for cultural misunderstandings
    - Therapist and Interpreter can feel isolated
    - Can create triangulation
      - Therapist and Interpreter competing against one another for alliance with client
      - Both Therapist and Interpreter can fail to value the unique strengths that the other brings to the therapeutic relationship



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### Important for Therapist to be AWARE of...

- Myth of Control:
  - Idea that "Therapist is in control over the session" needs to be mediated
  - Challenge is to recognize that and let go of the American/Western cultural concept about therapy
  - Do not know the culture or the language
  - Dependent on interpreter to mediate aspects of therapeutic relationship
  - Requires dynamic relationship of facilitation, collaboration and partnership

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## Potential Impact of Interpreter-Therapist Relationship

- Impact of third person in the room?
  - Someone observing therapeutic relationship and interventions
    - Requires Therapist to maintain confidence in their ability, yet humility to recognize areas of limitations
    - Need for Therapists and Interpreters to be aware of issues of countertransference and transference that occur in their relationship
      - Diligence to maintain healthy, strong working relationship between Therapist and Interpreter
      - Importance of valuing the unique strengths and skill set that each brings to therapeutic relationship

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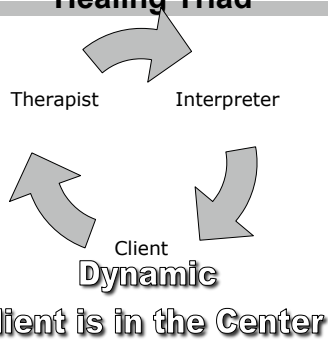
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## The Beauty of Strong Therapeutic Relationship: “Healing Triad”




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*Merci*

**Don't Forget...**

*Gracias*

*Asante*

- To **Thank Interpreters!**
  - Often underpaid and underappreciated
  - Go above and beyond in countless situations to serve population
  - Incredibly talented and compassionate individuals *Teschkürler*
  - Extremely Flexible and Adaptable *Urakoze*
  - As Service Providers, we could not serve population WITHOUT them!

**Ta-Blu**



**Dhanyabaad**

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## Sources

- DeVore, N. M. Vicarious trauma: The interpreter's role and challenge. [Retrieved electronically] on January 8, 2009 from [http://www.wisrid.org/Portals/0/Vicarious%20Trauma%5B.ppt#256,1,Vicarious Trauma](http://www.wisrid.org/Portals/0/Vicarious%20Trauma%5B.ppt#256,1,Vicarious%20Trauma).
- *The Cross Cultural Health Care Program (CCHCP)*. [www.xculture.org](http://www.xculture.org)

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