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**Finding Culturesmart**

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**Upcoming Training**

Boston area:

Caritas Good Samaritan Medical Center, Brockton

9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays, June 2, 2007, until August 4, 2007. (No class on July 7, 2007.)

Training will be offered in Arabic, Chinese Cantonese and Mandarin, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.

## The Essential Piece Training in NY: Diversity at Work

When Culturesmart presented its *The Essential Piece* interpreter training at Elmhurst Hospital Center in Elmhurst, NY, in fall 2006, the program offered coaching in three languages: Korean, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish.

But the program's diversity didn't stop with language. The 32 participants came from several organizations — the Queens Hospital Network, Mount Sinai Medical Center, and the American Cancer Society. A few "independents" also attended.

The training experience was even richer because trainees work in varied settings, says Culturesmart's Greg Figaro, who led the training. "At Queens Hospital Network, some training participants work as volunteers and serve as interpreters through the volunteer department. Participants from the American Cancer Society work for a division that provides outreach in many languages. Some from Mount Sinai are training other inter-

preters under the *Essential Piece* program. This group really shows that there is no one job track for people with medical interpreter training."

Greg was a speaker at the group's graduation ceremony on March 23. Two members of Mayor Bloomberg's office attended, as did David Golub, regional vice president of the American Cancer Society. "It was a very nice event," says Greg. The versatility of the *Essential Piece* program was an ideal fit for the group. The six-



day curriculum covers topics ranging from roles and standards for interpreters to ethics and the U.S. healthcare system. Language-specific training covers hundreds of vocabulary words and phrases that all medical interpreters should know.

*The Essential Piece* also fits many organizations because it includes language and medical assessments, before and after the training sessions. Culturesmart's experience has enabled it to develop metrics for over 20 languages, a difficult task for individual hospitals. "It's really a matter of economies of

scale," says Greg. "We've been working with trainees for 12 years, so we've been able to develop standards that establish a good basic knowledge of the information required of medical interpreters. Our standards fit all kinds of organizations."

**Public "Essential Piece" Training at Caritas Good Samaritan Medical Center**

Culturesmart will offer *The Essential Piece*™ training to the public in a Boston-area program this summer. All interested interpreters are welcome to apply. Languages: Arabic, Chinese Cantonese and Mandarin, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Caritas Good Samaritan Medical Center, J. Joseph Moakley Conference Center Brockton, MA Saturdays 9 a.m.-2 p.m, starting June 2-August 4, 2007. (No class on July 7.)

Early bird registration fee is \$645 until May 21. Late registration is \$695 After **May 21, 2007**. Visit [www.culturesmart.org](http://www.culturesmart.org) for information or to register.

## The Basics on Greg's Business Basics for Freelance Interpreters

Culturesmart's Greg Figaro often speaks at medical interpreting conferences about "Business Basics for Freelance Interpreters," providing advice on how interpreters can establish their own small businesses.

Greg knows his topic from personal experience: he began his career as a freelance interpreter, and his work evolved when he began training other interpreters. Here are some bits of advice on freelancing: **Psychology.** Many new freelancers

have difficulty seeing their work as small business activity. Don't confuse your gross business revenue and net income. Your gross business revenue is all the money you take in. Your net income is what's left after expenses.

**Taxes.** Pay your federal and state taxes, including quarterly estimated tax installments. Business expenses — e.g. insurance, work mileage — are not taxable, so track them to save. The Internal Revenue Service (<http://www.irs.gov/>) provides advice but many people hire accountants.

**Keep Current.** Stay informed about developments in the profession. See "Greetings from Greg" (pg. 2) for ideas on how to stay current.

*Culturesmart conducted a salary survey among interpreters. For information on pay rates, visit <http://www.mmia.org>*

## Greetings from Greg, by Greg Figaro, President and Founder, Culturesmart

Dear colleagues and friends:

Phew! It's been a busy winter here at Culturesmart, training interpreters in several locations, including New York City.

When I train new interpreters, I often wonder what happens after the sessions end. Do people seek out information about interpreting in their free time? Do they read about medical advances and health studies in the newspaper? Even more worrisome: How much time do any of us have to pursue new knowledge on our own?

We all have too much to do and too little time, but it's important to further our interpreting skills and knowledge of medicine. Science and our profession don't stand still, and neither can we: the patients and providers for whom we interpret expect us to be qualified professionals. That includes a familiarity with new developments.

It's difficult for me to provide easy answers about how to improve skills because every interpreter has his or her own weak points. Perhaps my first piece of advice should be: Be honest about your

strengths and weaknesses. Look to adjust the areas where you feel least secure. Here are a few ideas:

**Vocabulary.** We all have our own ways to learn and review difficult vocabulary by making lists or flashcards. Work on problems one body system or specialty at a time.



Greg with the Rosetta Stone.

**Interpreting Standards and Ethics.** If interpreting practices are your weakness, there is lots of help for you on the Internet!

**Current Events.** One easy resource to recommend is the science section of the Tuesday *New York Times*. Don't be scared off if there are photographs of wild animals on the front of the section: inside there are always great articles about health, including news about medicines, studies, and discoveries. There are often essays written by patients and

doctors, some of which look at ethical, psychological, and intercultural issues.

**Consider Your Career.** Ambitions and aspirations often grow along with knowledge of interpreting and medicine. I know this well from my own experience! As you consider new outlets for your skills, be sure to document your achievements. Update your resume to include certificates, degrees, and documentation of your language skills. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages performs recognized tests of written and oral language proficiency.

## Spotlight: Yoshie Ng, Interpreter, Culturesmart Language Coach

Yoshie Ng speaks four languages — Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, and English — with professional proficiency. With a head full of languages, Yoshie keeps her schedule busy, too. "My days are full with patients — out-patient, in-patient, ER, OR, etc. — and just like any working mother, I rush from work to pick up kids from school and drive to practice," she says.

Yoshie has worked as a staff medical interpreter at the Tufts-New England Medical Center in Boston since 1997, and her experience is invaluable to her work as a Culturesmart language coach of Japanese, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Language coaching is "one way that I can keep my language fresh," Yoshie says, because teaching coaxes words and experiences out of her memory.

Yoshie's other activity includes serving as a trainer for the medical and legal interpreter program at Boston University's Center for Professional Education and the Boston Area Health Care



Education Center. Yoshie has also been involved with MMIA since its founding in the 1990s.

Family is important to Yoshie, too: she worked as a full-time mother for eight years, returning to the work force when her children all started school. She sees that choice as an investment, not a sacrifice, calling it "time well spent. No regrets!"

Yoshie, a self-described air force brat, was born in Taiwan and raised in Japan. She traces her mother's roots back to the Ming Dynasty and her father's family to 3,800 years ago. She also adapted quickly to the U.S. when she moved to Boston in the 1970s. After a bus tour, she walked into an office building at Government Center in search of a job and quickly found her first position, at State Street Bank.

Culturesmart is proud that Yoshie and her many linguistic and intercultural skills enhance our program!

### Yoshie Ng: Advice from a Pro

**Avoiding Mistakes.** "Every day when I'm driving home I review all the words I have said." As she drives, Yoshie thinks of better word usage, keeping the phrasing in her head all the time.

**Self-Improvement.** "Invest yourself to learn. You're going to see the results." Interpreters should study continually, advises Yoshie. She founded "Yoshie's Study Group" at work to provide a forum for speakers to tell interpreters about topics like pulmonary disease, physical and occupational therapy, and social services.

**Handling Hard Days.** "Go home and play puzzles!" Yoshie eases stress by working on 500-piece jigsaw puzzles and playing the organ when she gets home. "It soothes," she says.

## Best Practices: Handling Difficult Situations with Patients and Providers

### What Should You Do If a Bilingual Staff Member or Relative of the Patient Wants to “Help”?

Interpreters encounter adverse situations nearly every day: long waits for rushed appointments, impatient patients, and difficult terminology are only a few of the problems we face.

One common — and very difficult — ethical dilemma involves bilingual medical staff and patients’ relatives. What should an interpreter do if a doctor with intermediate college Spanish insists on trying to carry out a patient appointment himself? What if a patient’s aunt wants to interpret?

Unfortunately, it’s not always easy to answer these questions. We know from studies that untrained friends and relatives of patients tend to make mistakes. Some errors are caused by lack of medical vocabulary, but often relatives filter information instead of interpreting everything.

Some hospitals allow family members to interpret if that’s the patient’s preference. Others categorically forbid family interpreters. Ask now how your employer views these situations so you can respond properly under various scenarios if necessary.

But what should or can you do if a situation is

not clear-cut? What if your hospital’s policy allows family interpreters, but you are certain that the person does not have the needed skills?

*Ask the Provider.* Tell the provider about your concerns in a private conversation.

*Reassure on Confidentiality.* Some families may be concerned about confidentiality. Remind everyone that you are ethically bound to confidentiality, completeness, and accuracy.

*Offer to Help.* Sometimes everyone can be happy together: pleasantly offer to stay and “help.” Remain unobtrusive, filling in or correcting as needed.

*Back out Gracefully if Necessary.* Depending on your employer’s policies, there may be times when you have no choice but to leave, even if you feel the situation is not favorable. Be sure to let your supervisor know about the problem immediately.

### Grace Under Pressure

One important attribute for interpreters is the ability to remain calm during difficult appointments. It can keep every-body — patient, provider, and you — much happier.

★Remember your role. Remind yourself of your task: facilitating patient-provider communication.

★Avoid internalizing everything. Interpreters should try to convey emotions in their interpretation... but don’t absorb them!

★Don’t speak too soon. If you’re very angry, nervous, or upset, find an opportunity to count to 10 and consider what you should or should not say.

★Offer an alternative. If you’re so upset about something that you feel you cannot interpret effectively, let the provider know what other live or telephone interpreters are available.

The American Lung Association estimates that over 20 million Americans — including 6.2 million children — have **asthma**. Over half suffer at least one **asthma attack** per year.

Asthma is a chronic **inflammatory** disease of the **airways**, tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. The inside walls of airways can become swollen as a reaction to **irritants** and **allergens** like cigarette smoke, house dust mites, feathers, cockroaches, cold air, stress, aspirin, and other drugs. The airways narrow, letting in less air, and the asthmatic person may have a variety of symptoms, including coughing, tightness in the chest, or a whistling sound called **wheezing**. In an asthma attack, the reaction is so severe that inflammation causes the airways to continue swelling and make more **mucous** than they should, further narrowing the airways and making it difficult to breathe.

Unfortunately, asthma attacks can become severe: the Lung Association estimates that asthma caused nearly 1.8 million emergency room visits in 2004. In 2003, there were 4,099 deaths from asthma.

Asthma is highly individual: some people rarely experience symptoms, but others wheeze frequently and take multiple medications. Doctors usually suspect asthma when they see characteristic symptoms. They perform **spirometry tests** to assess lung capacity and **airway obstruction**.

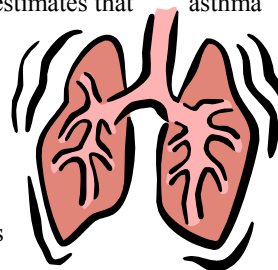
There are several ways to control asthma. Avoiding allergens and irritants helps, but many patients take medications, like inhaled **bronchodilator** drugs that widen the airways to relieve or prevent attacks, or **steroids** that block inflammation. Staying with a regimen is an important part of controlling the disease, but unfortunately many long-time asthmatics do not consistently use medications or visit their doctors.

This is only a very basic introduction to asthma. Learn more at:

American Lung Association: <http://www.lungusa.org/>

MedLine Plus: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/asthma.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/>



Waiting to inhale...

Med School for Interpreters: Asthma

## All in a Day's Work: Culturesmart News

### Out and About: Culturesmart Medical Interpreter Training Programs

♦ A summer session of *The Essential Piece* training will be held beginning on June 2, 2007, at Caritas Good Samaritan Medical Center's J. Joseph Moakley Conference Center in Brockton, MA. The program will be held 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturdays until August 4; there will not be class on July 7. **Languages: Arabic, Chinese Cantonese and Mandarin, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.**

Early bird registration fee of \$645 available until May 21. Late registration is \$695 After **May 21, 2007**. Visit [www.culturesmart.org](http://www.culturesmart.org) for information or to register.

♦ Culturesmart's fall and winter programs presented *The Essential Piece* training at Elmhurst Hospital Center in Elmhurst, NY, (please see page 1) and at Capital Community College in Hartford, CT. The New York program fit in with new state guidelines on providing interpreter training, and the Connecticut training was a part of the City of Hartford's Mayor's Healthy Community Initiative.

For information about training events, please contact Culturesmart at 617-890-1111 or visit [Culturesmart.org](http://Culturesmart.org).

### Culturesmart at Conferences

Culturesmart's conference schedule for spring 2007 includes two conferences where Greg Figaro will speak. Please come to see us!

♦ Greg will give a "Business Basics for Freelance Interpreters" talk at the conference **Advancing the Profession of Health Care Interpreting** in Des Moines, Iowa, on March 30-31, 2007. For conference information, visit: <http://www.iowastaterid.org/resources/documents/Spring2007Conference.pdf>

♦ Greg will also be at the **New England Translators Association (NETA)** conference on May 5, 2007. He'll present two 75-minute "Business Basics for Freelance Interpreters" workshops, one beginning, the other advanced. For conference information, see: <http://netaweb.org/>

Thanks to those of you who visited us at past events!

♦ Materials from the Quality Health Care for Culturally Diverse Populations conference are available at <http://www.diversityrx.org>.

♦ Greg's presentations at The Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association conference covered "Business Basics" and introduced a salary survey conducted by Culturesmart. The presenta-

