

NHS Update

Letter received in November 2023 by a Registrant from:

Robin Walker N4P
Member of Parliament for Worcester
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Thank you for contacting me about interpreting and translation services in the NHS.

I am very grateful to individuals and providers of interpreting and translation services who work in primary care and hospital settings. The skills they provide are vital for ensuring the NHS can meet its legal responsibility to ensure that local services are equally accessible to all sections of the community.

It is important to clarify that the Department of Health and Social Care does not make policy or issue guidance around translation services in the NHS. Responsibility for commissioning interpreting and translation services lies with local Integrated Care Boards. This reflects that NHS providers serve local populations with very different needs when it comes to translation and interpreting.

However, NHS England guidance - which applies to primary care and hospital settings - outlines clear expectations of commissioners, including that spoken language interpreters should be registered with the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), hold a Diploma in Public Sector Interpreting (DPSI) in Health and have training in medical terminology to communicate information effectively.

I would encourage local NHS commissioners and providers to make use of the NRPSI, which has an online register of 2,000 validated interpreters qualified in 100 different languages.

Where an interpreter does not hold a DPSI, minimum standards are set out for the interpreting qualification (NVQ Level 3) that they must hold. The guidance is also clear that interpreters should not be providing advocacy for patients.

I also understand that NHS England is carrying out a review to consider how community language translation and interpretation services can be improved, drawing on best practice from across the country. My understanding is that recommendations from this review will be agreed in March 2024.

Where there are concerns about communication that may have harmed or may harm patients, referrals can be made to the Health Services Safety Investigation Body to investigate the case.

ENDS
9th January 2024