

## Language support

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### Case study

*Mariam is a 28-year-old woman from Guinea. She suffers from recurrent bladder infections and got pregnant unplanned. She speaks French and doesn't request an interpreter. However, during a consultation where an interpreter (her cousin) happens to be present, she mentions having experienced bad things in her home country. The counsellor only speaks school-level French.*

### In practice

#### What are the risks of a language barrier?

- Inadequate information transfer can impact therapy adherence.
- Misunderstandings can lead to a lack of mutual understanding and/or conflict.
- Medical errors can impact the client's health.

#### How do you determine the common language?

- In which language does the patient wish to communicate?
- Is there a common language? If so, how well do both parties master it?
- If there is no common language mastered by both parties, call in an interpreter!

#### What language support is possible?

##### 1. Professional interpreters

- Physically present interpreter
  - Having a skilled interpreter present requires advance planning.
  - The local or provincial government might offer interpreting services.
- Intercultural mediators
  - Trained interpreters that are present in hospitals for example
  - Limited number of languages
  - Offer cultural interpretation ("retranslation") in addition to translation
- Telephone interpreter
  - Semi-professional or professional
  - Phone with or without microphone
  - Disadvantage: no non-verbal language
  - Register once via:
    - <http://www.vlaamsetolkentelefoon.be>
    - <http://www.sociaalvertaalbureau.be>
- Video interpreter
  - Preliminary pilot project
  - Less planning required
  - Non-verbal communication also possible
  - Very approachable

- More info:  
Intercultural Mediation Coordination Cell  
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## 2. Non-professional/informal interpreters

- Family members (often children), acquaintances, non-native colleagues
  - If possible: do not use young children
- No prior education
- Be mindful of the confidentiality, correctness and completeness of information
- Avoid distractions (phones, interrupting the conversation...)

## Which conversational skills are needed during a conversation with interpreter?

- Emphasise confidentiality.
- Use short sentences and questions in all phases of the conversation.
- Look at the patient to speak directly to them.
- When an informal interpreter accompanies the patient:
  - Try to ascertain the relationship with the patient. How desirable is this interpreter?
  - Which common language is used? How well does the interpreter master this language?
  - Define the interpreter's mandate and thank them for the help offered.
  - Ask the interpreter to translate everything both ways, as correctly and completely as possible.
  - Let the interpreter know they may interrupt you if something is unclear.
  - Structure your communication and don't provide too much information at once.
  - Keep an eye on the client's non-verbal responses.
- Definitely use a professional interpreter:
  - for bad news conversations
  - for complex diagnoses
  - in case of patient non-compliance or a suspicion of mutual misunderstanding
  - when underlying or evident psychosocial problems are suspected.

## Want to know more?

[http://www.kruispuntmi.be/sites/default/files/bestanden/documenten/adressenlijst\\_sociaal\\_tolk- en vertaaldiensten.pdf](http://www.kruispuntmi.be/sites/default/files/bestanden/documenten/adressenlijst_sociaal_tolk- en vertaaldiensten.pdf)