

Who Monitors Deaf Interpreters?

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As more and more Deaf people have entered the field of interpreting, I have become increasingly concerned about the apparent lack of oversight and enforcement of professional standards among these interpreters. It begs the question: whose responsibility is it to ensure proper skills, behavior, and business practices among Deaf interpreters?

I am a certified interpreter, an interpreter trainer for seven years, and continue to attend workshops and receive ongoing training in interpreting. I first received training to become what was then called a 'relay interpreter' under MJ Bienvenu in the 1980s.

I see more and more people in the community getting their CDI but see few training opportunities and, worse, no training required to get that certification. My program offers training for Deaf interpreters, but I see many not availing themselves of the opportunity, thinking that their life experience is enough to get by.

Professionalism is very important to me. I believe that Deaf and hearing

interpreters should both be held to the same high standards of professional behavior. What exactly entails 'professional behavior' is not necessarily instinctive or habitual; all interpreters must be taught to recognize, respect, and model these standards in their working lives. Such expectations include: dressing and grooming appropriately, being punctual, following the Code of Ethics (including only accepting work appropriate for one's experience and training), supporting the other working interpreter when not actively interpreting (supporting the 'team' from the 'off' chair), refraining from chatting with other interpreters when not actively interpreting, etc. Some Deaf interpreters show little understanding of the interpreting process; some seem to think that merely copy-signing is fulfilling their role as interpreter. The expectations of Deaf and hearing interpreters should be the same when it comes to training, continuing education, and attending workshops and conferences where such behaviors and values are discussed, taught and, not least importantly, modeled by the interpreters working at the event.

As a Deaf person, I question the exception made for Deaf interpreters in the recently-passed requirement that interpreters hold college degrees in order to take the certification

examinations. The Deaf community at large would never stand for untrained hearing interpreters; why should Deaf interpreters without training be acceptable?

My greatest concern is regarding the fees charged by interpreters. In my community, hearing interpreters without certification are charging \$15 to \$25 an hour, yet I see non-certified Deaf interpreters charging \$40 and \$50 an hour without anyone objecting or questioning these fees. Why is that? Why, in so many ways, are we tolerating and maintaining this double standard?

It seems there is an assumption that, because they are Deaf, some interpreters have privilege to act as hearing interpreters do not: they are excused from concerning themselves with professionalism, ethical behavior, training, charging appropriate fees, or any of a list of other things expected of hearing interpreters. I believe that if we want equal rights and equal opportunities, we must accept equal responsibilities as well. Getting away with less than that is unfair and reflects poorly on all Deaf interpreters, on the CDI, and on interpreting as a profession.

I will end with repeating the question I asked at the beginning: who monitors Deaf interpreters? ■