

## An Overview of On-Site and Remote Interpreting

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### Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to familiarize the reader with key differences between remote and on-site interpreting and to provide a guide for making the most appropriate choice for a given situation. Interpreting is the process of understanding, analyzing and processing a spoken or signed message and then faithfully rendering it into another spoken or signed language. Interpreters in all health care settings must meet the Oregon health care interpreter requirements for certification or qualification. Interpreters must accurately represent their credentials, and health systems should verify them.

### Discussion: On-site vs. Remote Interpreting:

Interpreting services play a crucial role in facilitating communication between speakers of different languages, ensuring equitable access to information and services. These services are delivered through two primary modalities: **on-site interpreting** and **remote interpreting**. Each method offers distinct advantages and challenges, making them suitable for different contexts. Below is a discussion of key aspects, benefits, and limitations of both delivery modalities to help participants make informed decisions.

## 1. On-site Interpreting

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### Definition

On-site interpreting involves the physical presence of an interpreter at the location where communication is taking place. This method is typically used in settings where direct human interaction is critical to the provision of healthcare services.

### Advantages

- **Enhanced Nonverbal Communication:**  
The interpreter can observe nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language. This is particularly important in contexts where emotions or cultural nuances play a significant role.
- **Fosters Trust and Rapport:**  
Being physically present allows the interpreter to build a stronger connection with the participants, which can be critical in emergent, complex and sensitive healthcare settings.

- **Ideal for Complex Interactions:**  
On-site interpreting is highly effective in situations involving several people (providers, interpreters, patients), intricate discussions, or when interruptions and clarifications are necessary.
- **No Dependence on Technology:**  
Eliminates the risk of technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity, audio delays, or platform malfunctions.
- **Health Care Interpreter Positioning:**  
Interpreters can use positioning skills to promote effective communication between the provider and patient, or others in the room, to respond to the demands of the encounter.

## Challenges

- **Logistical Limitations:**  
Scheduling and travel can be time-consuming and costly, particularly in rural or remote areas where interpreters may not be readily available.
- **Higher Costs:**  
Expenses associated with interpreter travel, lodging, and time may make this delivery method less cost-effective for organizations with limited budgets.
- **Limited Availability:**  
For languages of lesser diffusion, finding qualified on-site interpreters locally may be difficult.

### When to work with an on-site interpreter

- ✓ In situations involving complex communication.
- ✓ In situations involving individuals with an impediment to effectively using remote interpretation technology.
- ✓ In situations with multiple participants and less structured turn-taking.
- ✓ When a patient has cognitive limitations, such as a mental health crisis.

## 2. Remote Interpreting

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### Definition:

Remote interpreting is performed when the interpreter is not physically present but facilitates communication through technology, such as video conferencing platforms, telephones, or specialized interpreting software.

### Advantages

- **Increased Accessibility:**  
Remote interpreting enables access to a broader pool of interpreters, including those specializing in \*languages of lesser diffusion, regardless of geographic location.
- **Cost-Effective:**  
Eliminates travel expenses and reduces logistical challenges, making it a more affordable option for routine interactions or for organizations with limited resources.
- **On-Demand Availability:**  
Ideal for urgent or unexpected needs, as interpreters can be accessed quickly via phone or video.

\* A **language of lesser diffusion** refers to a language that is spoken by a relatively small number of people or by a population that is geographically, culturally, or socially isolated.

### Challenges

- **Limited Nonverbal Communication:**  
Over-the-phone interpreting (OPI) lacks visual cues entirely, while video remote interpreting (VRI) may still mask some subtleties due to screen limitations.
- **Technology Dependence:**  
Remote interpretation and communication rely on stable internet connections, high-quality audio, and functional devices. Technical failures can disrupt communication.
- **Interpreter Fatigue:**  
Interpreter fatigue is present in both on-site and remote interpreting. Fatigue related to audio quality should be addressed by more frequent turn-taking in remote simultaneous interpreting.
- **Perceived Impersonality:**  
Some participants may feel a lack of personal connection, which could affect trust and rapport, particularly in sensitive scenarios.

➤ **Privacy Concerns:**

The use of technology introduces potential risks for all parties related to health data privacy, security and confidentiality.

➤ **Patient- provider - interpreter positioning:**

Remote interpreters are unable to adjust positioning in encounters where participants may be moving and changing position.

**When to work with a remote interpreter**

- ✓ When a person comes to the office unscheduled, until an on-site interpreter arrives.
- ✓ When a scheduled on-site interpreter is not available.
- ✓ When two people who do not speak or sign the same language are not in the same place.
- ✓ When there are significant health risks to participants in the encounter, such as the risk of communicable diseases.
- ✓ For large scale remote health care events, allowing interpretation in many languages.
- ✓ For a range of calls of varying complexity, including emergency and routine follow-up calls.

### 3. Key Comparisons:

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<b><u>Aspect</u></b>	<b><u>On-site Interpreting</u></b>	<b><u>Remote Interpreting</u></b>
<b>Physical Presence</b>	Interpreter is physically present	Interpreter is remote via technology
<b>Nonverbal Communication</b>	Fully accessible	Limited (or absent in phone-only modes)
<b>Cost</b>	Higher due to travel and logistics	Lower due to no travel expenses
<b>Accessibility</b>	Limited to local interpreters	Global access to interpreters
<b>Technology Dependence</b>	Minimal	High
<b>Flexibility</b>	Requires scheduling	Often available on-demand
<b>Interpreter fatigue</b>	Occurs in both modalities	Occurs in both modalities
<b>Privacy and Security</b>	HIPAA required; all parties must have ongoing security protocol	HIPAA required; all parties must have ongoing security protocol

### 4. Factors to Consider When Choosing an Interpretation Modality

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➤ **Nature of the Interaction:**

- Highly emotional, sensitive, or nuanced interactions may benefit from on-site interpretation.
- When the encounter includes movement of persons and or equipment.
- When the parties have communication challenges or disabilities.

➤ **Urgency and Availability:**

- Remote interpreting is often the best option for immediate needs.

- **Budget:**
  - Organizations with limited budgets may prioritize remote interpreting for its cost-efficiency.
- **Language Rarity:**
  - For \*languages of lesser diffusion, remote interpreting can provide broader access to qualified professionals.
- **Technological Infrastructure:**
  - Consider the availability and reliability of technology when opting for remote interpreting, ensuring that all users can effectively operate the technology.

## **5. Ethical considerations for remote interpreting:**

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The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) Code of Ethics that all Oregon Health Care interpreters are required to follow, requires that interpreters “strive to render the message accurately, conveying the content and spirit of the original message, taking into consideration its cultural context.” When remote interpreters face impediments to accuracy, such as poor audio quality or fatigue, they have a duty to report the impediments to deliver an accurate rendition of the message and recuse themselves from providing the service remotely.

## **6. Compensation:**

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Consistent with the principle of equal pay for equal work, there should be equitable pay for equitable work, regardless of modality. However, both on-site and remote interpreters may have unique considerations for rate negotiations for independent contract interpreters, such as travel for on-site interpreting and down time for remote interpreting.

### **Reference material:**

[Interpreting: On-Site or Remote? A User Perspective](#)

[International Federation of Translators \(FIT\) Discussion Paper on Remote Interpreting Team Interpreting in Court-related Proceedings](#)

### **RID and National Association of the Deaf Resources:**

[Interpreting in Health Care Settings](#)

[Video Remote Interpreting](#)

[Minimum Standards for Video Remote Interpreting Services in Medical Settings](#)

[Position Statement on Mental Health Interpreting Services with People who are Deaf](#)

[Position Statement On Health Care Access For Deaf Patients](#)