



National Register of  
Public Service Interpreters

From Mike Orlov  
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National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)

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Maria Caulfield MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for  
Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
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**By email**

27 April 2023

Dear Ms Caulfield,

Thank you for your response of 20 April (ref. PO-1438099) to my communication dated 9 February about interpreting services and patient safety.

Thank you for outlining the details and outcomes to date of the specific inquiry into Ms Abdelkarim's death – and recognising that further work is needed to consider how to make improvements to the healthcare service's translation and interpreting services more broadly.

As you acknowledge, this instance of poor interpreting services in a healthcare setting is not isolated. You mention that NHS England is aware of other examples of healthcare safety investigations where access to, and standards of, community language translation and/or interpretation has been a factor in either poor health outcomes or patient safety incidents.

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) too has been made aware of numerous occasions where a bi-linguist, family member or those attempting interpreting in complex situations without the required interpreting experience or training has been used to interpret in healthcare settings, putting patients and healthcare workers at risk.

I maintain that the most effective way to ensure that the health service always has access to the best interpreting services and to safeguard patient safety is to make the use of Registered Interpreters mandatory across the health service.

This would mean the introduction of a new register of Community Interpreters to run alongside the existing NRPSI Register, something which NRPSI also advocates and is planning for. This would ensure that all interpreters who work with the health service (and indeed all other public services) are registered at the level appropriate to their professional qualifications and experience and adhere to the same Code of Professional Conduct.

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There are many benefits to making it a requirement that all Public Service Interpreters and Community Interpreters are registered with and regulated by a commercially and politically independent regulator that verifies their professional qualifications, experience and security clearances, and operates an unprejudiced professional complaints and disciplinary process.

Mandating the use of Registered Interpreters by NHS England and its contracted language agencies is one surefire way to protect against interpreting services factoring in poor health outcomes or patient safety incidents. I also think the adoption of this requirement would best serve NHS England's aim of making its procurement and appointment of language service providers more robust.

I appreciate this is a complex issue and that there are a number of factors that need consideration and discussion.

NRPSI would be very happy to contribute to any consultation and can provide unique insight as the UK's only public service interpreting regulator (voluntary or otherwise).

We are regularly consulted by other public sector organisations and government departments regarding issues relating to their language services provision. Indeed, we were instrumental in bringing about and are contributing to the Ministry of Justice's current independent review of its language services. The Police Service regularly consults NRPSI regarding its language services and its Police Service Police Approved Interpreters and Translators Scheme (PAIT) has adopted NRPSI standards.

I look forward to having the opportunity to discuss this matter with you in more depth. However, I also appreciate that, as this issue extends beyond women's health and maternity care to affect the entire NHS, you may think it would be more appropriate for me to pursue discussions with a colleague or another contact. That being the case, please let me know.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Orlov  
Executive Director and Registrar