

## **NHS and professional public service interpreting**

Extract from an email sent to Woman's Hour on 25<sup>th</sup> February

I was interested in your piece yesterday morning about self-administered cervical smears. Most encouraging but I would like to emphasise the need for professional interpreting services in any medical environment.

Please focus on the needs of those who may speak inadequate English as a second language or indeed may not speak English at all. Given the terms used when describing cervical smears are not commonly used terminology, ensure there is effective communication with patients to ensure there is no hindrance to accessing health services. And remember, women almost certainly will reasonably prefer not to ask their husbands, children, a receptionist or hospital or practice-cleaner for language support in this matter or indeed many other female health issues.

Obviously, accessible explanations will be needed both for the test and for subsequent actions such as results. Lack of delivery on language issues and lack of focus on removing hindrances to access public services including the National Health Service, is endemic and could well have played a part in the challenges we have seen for ethnic minority communities and the Covid-19 crisis; sharing a larger slice of the pain.

I do wonder whether there is a correlation between Covid-19 statistics and lack of focus on professional language skills by the government; successive governments stating public sector organisations in the main have no appetite for statutory regulation of public service interpreters.

Interpreters (spoken word) and translators (written word) always need to be properly qualified with public service interpreting qualifications at or above degree level and belong to a regulated body with a code of professional conduct which includes a requirement to be impartial; they need to know how to be professionally confidential and deliver best possible service. The right place to source them is the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (see [www.nrpsi.org.uk](http://www.nrpsi.org.uk)), launched 27 years ago at the behest of the UK's judiciary to avoid miscarriages of justice.

NRPSI is the freely accessible, National Register managed by the UK's spoken word public service interpreting regulating body. The National Register is a not-for-profit organisation, focusing on protection of the public. Like all professionals, the interpreters should be paid fairly for their skills and experience.

Misdiagnosis caused by poor interpreting issues needs to be avoided in the doctor's consulting room as much as miscarriages of justice in the courts brought about by deploying untrained, under-qualified and inexperienced pseudo-interpreters; lives are at stake – only use registered and regulated public service interpreters.