

## CREEC's Quick Guide:

### Sign Language Interpreters in Medical Settings



- The ADA requires communication with Deaf people that is “**as effective as**” communication with others.<sup>1</sup>
- Medical providers are required to “give **primary consideration to the requests**”<sup>2</sup> of Deaf patients in determining whether to provide an interpreter.
- The interpreter must be **qualified**.<sup>3</sup>
- Interpreters are **required for any complex or substantive communication** including history, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, surgery, medication, counseling, and billing/insurance.<sup>4</sup>
- The provider **may not ask family or friends** -- especially children -- to interpret, except in emergencies.<sup>5</sup>
- Qualified interpreters may include on-site interpreters or video remote interpreting (VRI).<sup>6</sup>
- When **VRI is NOT OK**:<sup>7</sup>
  - patient has limited movement in head, hands, or arms;
  - patient has vision or cognitive issues or under the influence of drugs or alcohol;
  - patient is in significant pain, including labor;
  - the medical issue is complex;
  - if there are space limitations in the room; or
  - any time it's clear that VRI is not providing effective communication.

- If VRI is used, **it must meet these standards**:<sup>8</sup>
  - **Sufficient bandwidth** for high quality, real-time, full-motion video and audio that does not have lags, choppy, blurry, or grainy images, or irregular pauses in communication;
  - A **sharply delineated image** that is large enough to display the interpreter's face, arms, hands, and fingers, and the participating individual's face, arms, hands, and fingers, regardless of his or her body position;
  - A **clear, audible transmission of voices**; and
  - **Adequate training** to users of the technology and other involved individuals so that they may quickly and efficiently set up and operate the VRI.

## Resources

- [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: Directory of Certified Interpreters](#)
- [National Association of the Deaf: Minimum Standards for VRI Services in Medical Settings](#)
- [US Department of Justice: Communicating with People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Hospital Settings](#)
- [CREEC's Quick Guide to Sign Language Interpreters in Medical Settings \(this document in html and pdf\)](#)

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<sup>1</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1) (incorporated by reference in 45 C.F.R. § 92.202(a)). Section 35.160 can be found here: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2017-title28-vol1/pdf/CFR-2017-title28-vol1-sec35-160.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(b)(2) (incorporated by reference in 45 C.F.R. § 92.202(a)).

<sup>3</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.104; 28 C.F.R. § 36.303(b). Some states require that an interpreter also be certified or licensed.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Settlement Agreement Between the United States of America and Highline Medical Center, [https://www.ada.gov/highline\\_med\\_ctr\\_sa.html](https://www.ada.gov/highline_med_ctr_sa.html).

<sup>5</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(c) (incorporated by reference in 45 C.F.R. § 92.202(a)).

<sup>6</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.104; 28 C.F.R. § 36.303(b).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Highline Medical Center Settlement, [https://www.ada.gov/highline\\_med\\_ctr\\_sa.html](https://www.ada.gov/highline_med_ctr_sa.html).

<sup>8</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(d) (incorporated by reference in 45 C.F.R. § 92.202(a)).