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## Limited English Speaking Patients Closer to Being Guaranteed Quality, Equitable Healthcare

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National Certification for Medical Interpreters Launches; Inaugural Members of the National Board of Medical Interpreters to Oversee Certification Announced

WASHINGTON, Oct. 12 /PRNewswire/ -- Patients in the United States with limited English proficiency (LEP) continue to face language barriers that threaten their health and undermine their well-being. But today they are one step closer to quality, equitable healthcare with the launch of the first National Certification for Medical Interpreters. A culmination of an over 20-year effort that included stakeholders from across the industry, this first-of-its-kind national interpreting standard provides professional interpreters working in the medical field with the opportunity to be tested and credentialed as "Certified Medical Interpreter" (CMI).

The CMI designation will first be available to Spanish language interpreters, with national certification rolling out for several other languages in 2010.

"Hospitals across the country should provide their patients with qualified interpreters that can prevent the miscommunications and subsequent medical errors that still occur far too often in some of today's hospitals," said Mursal Khalif, Senior Director of Multilingual Services, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge, Massachusetts. "A national certification for medical interpreters has been desperately needed to ensure the safety of LEP patients and I am extremely delighted that we now have a national standard in place."

Language Line Services President and COO Louis Provenzano noted that according to a recent study by The Joint Commission, LEP patients are almost twice as likely to suffer adverse events in U.S. hospitals.

"In the highly regulated field of medicine, where doctors, nurses, medical assistants and even our health insurance agents must hold federal and state licenses, it seems outrageous that until now the medical interpreter, who is quite literally the bridge between a patient and potential life-saving care, had no nationally recognized certification standard," added Provenzano.

Today's launch of the first national certification program coincides with the announcement of the inaugural members of the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters, an independent non-profit certification entity founded to oversee the national certification process, award qualifying individuals the credential of "Certified Medical interpreter" (CMI) and ensure overall LEP patient safety. The 12-member inaugural board, which represents top leaders from across the medical and interpreting industries, includes:

- Jeanette Anders, Manager of Health Care Strategic Initiatives, Language Line University, AZ
- Elizabeth Chegezy, medical interpreter and educator, PA
- Martin J. Conroy, Senior Manager Public Sector Initiatives, Language Line Services, NY
- Karina Craig, Program Manager, CIIC Comunidad Integrada-Integrated Community, CO

-- Joel Dougherty, Chief Operating Officer, OneWorld Community Health Centers, Inc., NE  
-- Eric Hardt, MD, physician, Boston Medical Center, MA  
-- Elena Langdon, medical interpreter and Supervisor of Interpreter and Translation Services, Baystate Health, MA  
-- Nelva Lee, Ph.D., President, The Medical Interpreting and Translation Institute Online ( MITIO) and IMIA Certification Committee, GA  
-- Theo Oshiro, Director of Health Advocacy, Make the Road New York, NY  
-- Inna Persists-Gimelberg, Linguistic Programs Manager, Culture Insight at  
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, MA  
-- Alvaro Vergara-Mery, Ph.D., staff interpreter, University Medical Center  
of Southern Nevada, and IMIA Nevada State Representative, Nevada  
-- Rita Weil, Ph.D., medical interpreter and educator, PA

The board will review other applications received and may appoint other members and will work to ensure all stakeholders are involved in the process.

"My colleagues and I are honored and excited to be selected to lead this historic endeavor that will guarantee competent medical interpretation in the United States and improve patient safety and quality of care for limited English speaking patients," said Dr. Eric Hardt, MD, of Boston Medical Center. "It is our mission to ensure that the certification process is credible, transparent, valid and inclusive, and protects the interest of all stakeholders that can be impacted by certification."

During their three-year term, the board members will be responsible for the policies and procedures related to the implementation of the certification program, which will adhere to the standards and requirements mandated by the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA). They will also assume responsibility of overseeing the qualification and screening programs that are necessary to grant credentials to all working interpreters.

The inaugural members of the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters were chosen through an open and public process that invited all industry stakeholders to participate. Following a call for participation issued in June and again in July that invited interested individuals and organizations to apply to become board members, an independent selection committee, which included representatives from across the industry, spent more than two months reviewing applications and vetting potential candidates.

"Although there is still work to be done, with the rollout of additional languages in 2010, I am very pleased with progress we've made and thrilled that a single national certification standard was put in place in 2009," said Izabel Arocha, President of the International Medical Interpreters Association, one of the founders of the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters. "I am especially proud of the manner in which we selected the national board. The founders did not want to appoint board members; it had to be a process that was open to the public."

#### About the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters

The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters is a non-profit organization, formed from an independent group of industry professionals that represent all key stakeholder groups, including professional medical interpreters, trainers, employers, providers, and regulators. The National Board serves as the certifying entity and has independent authority over all essential certification decisions. The purpose of certification is to ensure LEP patient safety by evaluating and assuring the competency of medical interpreters. It will not be responsible for accreditation of educational or training programs or courses of study as per accreditation guidelines. The

formation and structure of the National Board of Certification will adhere to the standards and requirements for certification program governance mandated by the National Organization for Competency Assurance. For more information, visit <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org>.

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