



INforMHAA: Interpreter-mediated Mental Health Act Assessments

Best practices for Approved Mental Health Professionals and Interpreters working together

Part 5. Briefing between interpreters and AMHPs

Introduction

A briefing refers to a **preparatory session** that takes place between an AMHP and an interpreter before conducting a MHAA. It sets the foundation for developing shared **understanding** and **effective collaboration** between the AMHP and the interpreter during the actual assessment. Our research shows

the benefits of a pre-assessment briefing between an AMHP and an interpreter in pre-empting common misunderstandings about respective professional roles and reflecting on preferred strategies to address common practice challenges. (See Part 2 Context and key roles and Part 7 Types of interpreting).

This guidance outlines key considerations and practices for AMHPs and interpreters to conduct effective briefings.



What might an AMHP want to ask or check in a briefing?

- Establish the interpreter's level of experience with the MHA and wider mental health settings.
- Ascertain the interpreter's familiarity with MHAAs and reinforce their purpose and potential outcomes if required.
- Ascertain the interpreter's familiarity with the AMHP's role in the assessment, reminding them where necessary of key statutory duties they play (e.g., consultation with Nearest Relative; consideration of the least restrictive alternative) and key responsibilities including e.g., the co-ordination of the assessment.
- Discuss the interpreter's confidence in handling commonly used terms in MHAAs, particularly legal ones. Advise on terms you are likely to use in the assessment and discuss how these might be best explained.
- Ascertain the interpreter's preferred ways of working (e.g., how they handle certain features of talk like disordered speech, overlapping talk, seating arrangements, and disclosures about whether they know the assessed person, etc).
- Find out whether the interpreter will have time at the end for a short debrief.
- Ask about the interpreter's level of exposure to situations that can be emotionally disturbing. Remind them to be mindful of their own reactions.
- Invite reflection on the interpreter's experience of how questions are asked in the assessment. Remind them that sometimes questions might sound hard, but they should not be afraid to replicate the tone.
- Agree with the interpreter how they will communicate with you during an assessment if they are struggling and what action you will take (e.g., stopping the assessment and booking a different interpreter, if it is safe to do so).
- Establish whether a deaf intralingual/ relay interpreter is needed for a deaf person being assessed (e.g., if they do not know British Sign Language or have disordered sign language production).

- Discuss any potential risks and concerns associated with the physical environment and how to maximise the safety of all involved.
- Provide the interpreter with any key points about the mental state of the person being assessed that are relevant (e.g., whether they are experiencing hallucinations or are very withdrawn).

What might an interpreter want to ask or check in a briefing?

- Request a short overview of the situation you are about to enter into.
- Disclose whether you have interpreted in MHAAs before and share any concerns you might have based on these experiences.
- Request overview of any key terms that might be used, especially terms that have legal significance and check your understanding of them to aid explanation. In particular, be alert for 'false friends' – terms that in lay language have one meaning but in this context have a highly specific meaning e.g. Nearest Relative. (See Part 6 Key concepts and terms).
- Agree with the AMHP what action you will take if you have met the assessed person before and how this will be handled in the assessment. Be mindful of the issues arising from the often limited pool of interpreters working with certain language combinations, and the potential anxieties triggered for service users if you have worked with them in another non-mental health related setting.
- Establish whether the AMHP has worked with an interpreter before. Be prepared to provide a basic overview of your role, your interactional preferences (e.g., first or third person interpreting) and what they can do to work effectively with you.
- Establish whether any particular safety precautions could be needed (e.g., in relation to clothes, jewellery, note-taking, seating arrangements).

In all matters the goal is to promote effective interpreter-AMHP working to ensure that the best possible conditions are created for the person who is at the centre of the assessment and their family members.

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