

## Tips for Communicating Through an Interpreter

- Speak one or two sentences at a time; then pause for the interpretation (If you go on too long, the interpreter won't remember everything you said.)
- Speak slowly and clearly, but do not pause in the middle of a phrase.
- Don't use slang expressions (e.g. Stay on track; she's on the ball). These expressions are hard to translate.
- Look at the patient.
- Have patience with the process.
- **BEWARE:** Untrained interpreters distort what was said – even when they are fluent in both languages. They add things that were not said, leave out things that were said, and change the meaning. Family members may intentionally hide information from the patient or from the health care provider and they may add their own opinions.

### **IF you MUST work with an untrained interpreter, say this to the interpreter:**

- “I will speak in one sentence at a time. Please interpret everything I say. Do not add anything; do not omit anything; do not change anything.”
- “Please ask the patient to speak in one sentence at a time. Please interpret everything she/he says. Do not add, omit, or change anything.”
- “Your opinion is very important, but please keep it separate from what the patient and I are saying – so everyone is clear about who is saying what.”
- “Did the patient say that? Or is that something you are adding?”
- “Did the patient say anything else?”
- “Did you tell the patient everything I said? Do you need me to repeat anything?”
- “Ask the patient to explain in his or her own words what I said. Please interpret what the patient says without changing anything. That way I can tell if the patient understood what I said.”

*Blia Yang Moua receives treatment for kidney failure but speaks almost no English. His interpreter, Ted Xiong, translates between the medical professionals and patient. (MPR Photo/Sanden Totten)*

