



Working Together to Advance the Profession of Medical Interpreters

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The photo above shows the slogan we chose 10 years ago to finally accomplish a dream – to offer national medical interpreter certification. It was high time! Interpreters had long sought to be part of a bona fide profession and to stand together with other health care providers as equal partners working for the benefit of the patient.

This dream started in 1986 with the founding of the MMIA (Massachusetts, and then the International Medical Interpreters Association), which had in its Bylaws the responsibility to work towards creating a fair and authentic certification tool for medical interpreters.

Through a long process of vision, leadership, allocating resources and the volunteer work of many, many interpreters, we took the bold steps necessary to realize our dream.

In 2008 at a May 1 National Medical Interpreter Certification Forum, one of many such forums held to include as many stakeholders as possible in the development of certification, Orlin Márquez, then President of the Medical Interpreter Network of Georgia (MING), made a proposal: he said we should resolve to have a pilot of a national medical certification test in a year's time. The meeting enthusiastically adopted this resolution. That is where the slogan "Yes we can and we will in 2009" originated.

And we did it! In a year's time we carried out a national job analysis survey with input from over 1,500 interpreters across the country, developed the exam following the strict national guidelines for creating a certification exam, and piloted and validated the written exam, in English, and the oral exam for Spanish. This was done in partner with PSI, a leading testing development company in the assessment industry.

For a nostalgic look at the announcement of the launching of certification at an IMIA conference in 2009 in front of 500 attendees, see this YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z21jW1O5SXQ>

Then we offered the exams and waited to see the response – and it was grand. The real pioneers were the early adopters – those interpreters who were the first to come forward and become certified. In the early years taking a computerized exam was a new experience for many, and there were sometimes computer glitches, so a lot of support work had to be done, and everyone had to have a lot of patience. At that time interpreters traveled to testing centers, and some were so eager to get certified that they would travel great distances to do so. Our hats go off to those interpreters that laid the groundwork for certification to become real.

There is much more history to relate, and I will save this for another time, but for this anniversary I wanted to look back ten years to the birth of our certification. Now ten years later we interpreters can continue to advocate and promote certification as an important action that we can take to advance the profession. Please consider getting involved in the professional organizations in your community, nationally and internationally and contribute your talents and expertise to our professionalization. Working together we can continue to move forward – yes we can! ¡Sí se puede!