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**Contacts: Shiva Bidar-Sielaff**  
[s.bidarsielaff@ncihc.org](mailto:s.bidarsielaff@ncihc.org)  
(608) 265-7424

**Karin Ruschke**  
[k.ruschke@ncihc.org](mailto:k.ruschke@ncihc.org)  
(773) 525-8590

**Co-chairs, Standards, Training  
& Certification Committee  
National Council on  
Interpreting in Health Care**

## **National Council on Interpreting in Health Care Develops National Standards for Interpreters**

**Work co-funded by The Commonwealth Fund and The California Endowment to  
bring national standards of practice in health care to interpreters.**

(Chicago – November 14, 2005) The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) today released the *National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care*, the first such national standards for medical interpreting professionals in the United States.

Health care disparities have been well documented, and immigrant and refugee populations have particularly suffered largely to language barriers. Quality health care depends on clear communication. These standards will help ensure the provision of quality interpreting across the nation – a key factor in the reduction of barriers to health care access for the millions of limited English speaking people.

These standards are to be used for training, hiring, performance evaluation and discussion on certification of professional competence. The standards will provide a common base of understanding of the profession, foster the consistency, and improve the quality of interpreter services.

The standards include guidelines on accuracy, confidentiality, impartiality, respect, cultural awareness, role boundaries, professionalism, professional development and advocacy.

"This is the first set of national standards of practice developed by professionals in medical interpreting, derived from well-established practices in California and Massachusetts," said Commonwealth Fund Senior Program Officer Anne C. Beal, M.D. "Adopting these standards nationwide will be key to enhance professionalism in the field,

improve quality of care, promote communication between patients and physicians, and reduce errors."

Health care interpreting, where a bilingual professional facilitates communication between health care providers and patients, is a distinctive and specialized area of interpreting practice. To date, no national body has provided clear, consistent definitions of the characteristics and competencies of a qualified health care interpreter, leaving interpreters and health care facilities with little or no guidance on the qualifications and proper role of the interpreter. As a result, the quality of health care interpreting across the country is uneven and inconsistent, leading to potentially incomplete, inaccurate and dangerous communication. The clinical and financial ramifications of such poor communication are well documented in the professional literature.

"These national standards will ensure the highest quality of health care interpreting," said California Endowment Program Director Ignatius Bau. "They need to be adopted by hospitals, health plans and health systems for assessment, training and ultimately, certification, of health care interpreters. They are a major advancement towards the integration of health care interpreters as vital members of health care teams."

Co-funded by The Commonwealth Fund and The California Endowment, the standards were developed through a national consensus-building process that included focus groups and surveys of hundreds of working health care interpreters from across the United States over a two-year period. State and regional organizations also participated.

In addition to the focus groups and surveys used to develop the standards, two state organizations and their work were used as models: the Medical Interpreting Standards of Practice developed by the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association (MMIA) and The Education Development Center, and the California Standards for Healthcare Interpreters: Ethical Principles, Protocols, and Guidance on Roles & Intervention developed by the California Healthcare Interpreting Association (CHIA).

A complete copy of the National Standards of Practice document can be downloaded from the NCIHC website: [www.ncihc.org](http://www.ncihc.org).

The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care is a multidisciplinary organization based in the United States whose mission is to promote culturally competent professional health care interpreting as a means to support equal access to health care for individuals with limited English proficiency

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