

- Views on Sign Language Interpreters in Medical Settings for Infectious Diseases

With the worldwide spread of the new Coronavirus, COVID-19, concern about infection of sign language interpreters in medical settings has been increasing.

There is a fear of infections to registered sign language interpreters who receive no health care coverage or paid sick leave in the current system “providing interpretation by mainly dispatching registered sign language interpreters”. In addition, possible infection of staff members at Information Centers for the Deaf, mostly running under the designated manager system, would have a great impact on these facilities’ operations.

With all these matters, regarding information access and communication guarantee in the medical settings, and the prevention of infection to sign language interpreters, we work for “clarifying the public responsibilities” and “avoiding the use of interpreters whose guarantee of the status is not sufficient” and make our opinion public as below: from (1) to (3).

Since these issues above are caused by the current insufficient system, we will make continued efforts to establish “the sign language interpreting system of mainly hired sign language interpreters”.

(1) Necessity of an Information Guarantee for Persons with Hearing Impairment

All hearing impaired persons need information access and communication guarantee by proper ways in any medical settings.

Appropriate treatments, and clear and accurate information are essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It is the responsibility of the Japanese government and local governments in Japan to provide the information access and communication guarantee.

(2) Necessity of Infection Prevention to Sign Language Interpreters

All sign language interpreters need to be provided necessary and sufficient measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by proper ways in any medical settings. In addition, it is the responsibility of the Japanese government, local governments in Japan, and medical institutions to provide information about the actions to be taken by the interpreters after the interpretation service.

If a sign language interpreter were to be infected while interpreting, it should be handled as an

occupational injury, and the interpreter should be entitled to compensation for absence from work and for their own medical treatment. Therefore, from this point of view, registered sign language interpreters have not sufficient guarantees; therefore, they are not to be dispatched in such risky settings.

(3) Necessity of the Advance Information

It is the responsibility of the Japanese government and local governments to inform, in advance, to both hearing impaired persons and sign language interpreters regarding their limitations of action and behavior during treatment of infectious disease.

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