



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

MEDICAL  
INTERPRETER SERVICES

40th Anniversary of Medical Interpreter Services at Mass General, and Medical Interpreter and Translator Week

This year Medical Interpreter Services (MIS) celebrated a truly special Interpreter and Translator Week, given that it also represented the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Medical Interpreters at MGH. Beginning with an Opening Breakfast on Monday, September 30, sponsored by the Department, interpreters enjoyed a morning meal in the Conference Room to kick off the week. Then on Tuesday, our interpreters hosted a table in the White Lobby in which our full range of services were on display.



Carmen Vega-Barachowitz reunites with old friend and colleague, Margarita Battle, the first Coordinator of Interpreter Services.

Interpreter and Translator week continued Wednesday evening with an Interpreter Grand Rounds in the O’Keefe Auditorium, presented by the MGH Asylum Clinic. During and after the presentation, several interpreters who had worked with the Asylum Clinic related their experiences. Matthew Gartland MD, Stephanie Cooper, MBA and Kerry Phelan offered a fascinating perspective on working with patients who are seeking asylum in the United States. They along with participants recognized the reality of vicarious traumatization for the



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medical interpreter doing these interpretations, especially in cases where interpreters had been through similar experiences.

On Thursday Interpreter Services hosted the main event of the week in the Thier Conference Room. Two colleagues were honored as the 2019 Language Access Champions (LAC). The first was Dr. Ernesto Gonzalez from Dermatology for having been one of the original supporters of creating a robust language access program at MGH, as well as being a champion of diversity at this institution. The second LAC was Dr. David Ebb from Pediatric Hematology/Oncology for his ability to include the inter-

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preters on his team and work with them in an effective manner to provide his patients with the highest quality, most compassionate, and safest care possible.

Dr. Peter Slavin offered remarks to open the event noting the critically important role of interpreters in offering access to healthcare at MGH to the diverse communities we serve in an equitable manner. Among other invited guests were Debbie Burke, Senior VP for PCS and Chief Nurse; and the very first person to be given the title of Coordinator of Interpreter Services back in 1985, Margarita Battle.

All present enjoyed a vast array of cultural foods prepared by the interpreters. In his comments of gratitude to the medical interpreters, Chris Kirwan, Director of Interpreter Services recognized what an outstanding team the interpreters are and how their professionalism and dedication leads to higher quality and safe care for our patients. He concluded by saying, “this team is a beacon to the wider community here at MGH: all are welcome, and we stand ready to care for all patients that come through our doors.”

On Friday, Interpreter and Translator week ended with a special Grand Rounds presentation by Dallas Duchar, NP from the MGH Transgender Health Program. This week presented the perfect opportunity to recognize the work of interpreters

over the past 40 years at MGH, celebrate the diversity of our patients and the MGH staff and focus on how interpreters will continue to make essential contributions to the mission of MGH.



Dr. David Ebb (at the podium) and Dr. Ernesto Gonzalez (seated). Both were recipients of the 2019 Language Access Champion Award.

### Note of Gratitude from the Director

I would like to express my most sincere appreciation to all of the interpreters who work at MGH. Your passion, dedication and professionalism are earmarks of what makes this team one of the best in the country. Our 40th Anniversary Celebration honored our beginnings, our evolution, our present and the bright future ahead of us. So on behalf of all your patients, the providers you team with and the leadership of MGH: THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! You are a marvelous group of individuals who make up an incredible team, I couldn't be more honored to work with you.  
Chris

## Feature Article: Not Quite “Mr. Holland’s Opus”

By Andy Beggs

The garbage cart went clanking by in front of me in the MGH basement hallway. Suddenly the cart stopped, and someone looked over at me and shouted in Spanish, “Hey Andy, you helped me the other day in Physical Therapy!” I waved and moved on to my next encounter with a warm feeling in my heart for having been remembered. We don’t get that all the time in our job. Words of thanks from a patient you have helped in the past may be few and far between. Some of this has to do with the norms of the job itself. We do not build close relationships with our patients outside of the interpreting encounters.

With each successive encounter with the same patient we get to know each other a bit better. Overall though, the thanks we get from the patients comes right after the interpretation, not days, weeks, or years later.

It is little moments like this one, that I experienced in the basement hallway, that remind me of just how many lives we are touching on a day to day basis. We are there for so many patients at some of the most vulnerable points in their lives. From a PT appointment, to a clinic consult, to an end of life family meeting, we are the critical link between the

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*Note Quite Mr. Holland's Opus, cont from p 2*

patients and their providers. They need and appreciate this more than we will ever know.

The movie "Mr. Holland's Opus" presents the life of a musician who has a dream of being a great composer, but his day job is that of a High School music teacher. In the evenings, he works arduously on what he hopes to be his masterpiece, his opus. Yet he is haunted by the thought that he has not achieved what he might have in life. Then at the very end of the movie, on the day of his retirement, he is presented with a surprise. He is led into an auditorium

filled with his former students, now all adults, with instruments in hand, and they proceed to play his opus for him. It is a typical Hollywood ending.

Though my chance meeting with a patient and his thanks is not an orchestra playing my life's opus, it certainly was a glimpse of gratitude from just one out of the many lives we touch each day. Each interpreter works on their own opus; and while the applause we hear must come from within, a moment of recognition is certainly nice and appreciated.

## Inpatient Labor and Delivery hosts Perinatal Bereavement Workshop with the Participation of Interpreter Services

This month Medical Interpreter Services participated in a Perinatal Bereavement Workshop organized by Sandra Stokes, LICSW and Elizabeth West, RN, the CNS for Blake 14 Labor and Delivery. Andy Beggs was asked to represent Medical Interpreter Services and related two cases in which he was involved as an interpreter where there were perinatal deaths. He also offered those gathered, an audience made up mostly of nurses working in areas where they might encounter a perinatal death, the unique perspective of a medical interpreter. Also presenting were representatives from OB Palliative Care, the Parking Department, Spiritual Care, and Pathology. As a backdrop to his presentation, Andy used an illustration (pictured below) which is of a painting drawn by one the volunteer interpreters that worked at the hospital over 20 years ago. The image was given as a gift to all interpreters



present during the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of Medical Interpreter Services at MGH, by Margarita Battle, the first person to be named Coordinator of Interpreter Services at Mass General. It depicts the interpreter bringing the western, medical culture and mindset together with the culture of the patient, and aiding understanding for both provider and patient.

Andy's takeaway points for the audience were:

1. To always have a brief huddle with the interpreter before an encounter, especially a sensitive one such as those involving a perinatal death.
2. To ask the interpreter, in the huddle, if there are any cultural factors that are likely to come into play.
3. When there is tension and disagreement, as there was in both cases that Andy discussed, to realize that the interpreter is not on any one side of a disagreement but helping each side to communicate their own point of view.
4. To consider including the interpreter in any debrief, as the medical interpreter does not always follow a case from beginning to end, but rather sees a snapshot in time, and then moves on to the next case, often without any closure on what is for all a difficult encounter.

Our participation in such workshops throughout the hospital gives those less familiar with our department the opportunity to learn more about the work we do and helps them to work better with interpreters they will meet and work with in day-to-day patient care.

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The MIS Newsletter was created in response to the need for a new and improved mode of inter-departmental communication. The information shared in this publication is intended for the use of MGH MIS staff and freelance interpreters.

We are always looking for information and ideas for articles that would interest our readers. Please submit any contributions that you might have to Andy Beggs at the email address given to the left.

Whether you have an important event that impacts our profession, an article that might be of interest, or general information that the department might find useful, please help to make this instrument an effective method of communication.

Thank you!

## Profile of Lead Coordinator Melissa Calverley

By Andy Beggs

**Language: Spanish**  
**Country of Origin: Dominican Republic**  
**At MGH Since: 2002**  
**(Interpreter Services since 2017)**

Melissa began her time at Mass General when she was still a student at East Boston High School. There, she pursued a health care path, through which she had the opportunity to shadow staff at Mass General and to see different areas of the hospital. Long before EPIC, Melissa was helping to organize the medical charts, simplifying them so that the nurses could use just one questionnaire for admissions. She soon began shadowing nurses, going into patient rooms, and getting a feel for patient care.

While studying Nursing at Salem State University, Melissa was also working per diem at the hospital. It was during that time that she met Dwayne, the EMT who was to become her husband, when he brought a patient up to White 11! When Melissa became pregnant during her third year of nursing school, she knew that school was not her first priority. "If I was going to be a Mom," says Melissa, "I wanted to be present." Professionally though, she realized that she had enough credits to be a Medical Assistant. Melissa reached out to Jeanette Ives Erickson, then Senior Vice President of Patient

Care Services and now Chief Nurse Emerita, who encouraged Melissa in her goals. Soon she was working for the Cancer Center on Yawkey 7-B, and then on Lunder 9. By this time, she had two children, and was a Certified Nursing Assistant.



Melissa worked for about a year at East Boston Health Center, first as a medical interpreter and then as the Coordinator and Office Manager. From East Boston Health Center, Melissa made the move back to Mass General as Lead Coordinator of Medical Interpreter Services.

Melissa says that, "we have an amazing team," and that we couldn't have a Medical Interpreter Services without all of us working together as well as we do. She is very content in her job, so much so that her husband calls this department "Your Happy Place." As we all know, Melissa is highly skilled in working with staff who request interpreters from all over the hospital. She explains that she is good at connecting with people, and has been around Mass General for so long that people calling in will often recognize her voice. Even if difficult situations arise, she takes it "one phone call at a time." And after all, she concludes, "I am in my Happy Place."