

Intercultural communication in medical interpreting

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The presentation explores various intercultural communication issues in doctor-patient encounters mediated by medical interpreters. It focuses specifically on communication issues relating to a space, which is closely associated with the lives of many migrants: ethnic migrant communities. Drawing on interviews with professional interpreters in Australia, the presentation investigates three distinctive themes based on the real experiences of medical interpreters. First, it focuses on the issue of loneliness among elderly migrants, who heavily rely on members of their own ethnic groups for socialization, and the impact of social isolation on communication behaviours of elderly patients in medical settings. The second issue relates to shame and stigma attached to mental illness within migrant groups, which not only hinders migrant patients and families from coming forward, but also leads them to suspect interpreters as potential sources of community gossip. Lastly, the presentation examines conflicts arising from different approaches to communicating a bad diagnosis between doctors and migrant patients living in societies where the common expectations and practices may be culturally alien to them. Throughout the presentation, emphasis is placed on the causes of communication problems as well as professional strategies employed by medical interpreters to address the intercultural communication issues that arise.