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The National Coalition on Healthcare Interpreter Certification (NCC) last week stepped up its ambitious plan to develop a single national process for the assessment, training, testing, and certification of healthcare interpreters.

“As The Joint Commission moves forward in developing hospital standards on culturally competent patient-centered care, we look forward to the results of NCC’s work to improve access and quality of care for patients with limited-English proficiency in our culturally diverse communities,” said Amy Wilson-Stronks of The Joint Commission, formerly known as the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the organization that accredits the majority of the nation’s hospitals.

The NCC, whose membership includes a wide range of nonprofit associations, language-service companies, and consumer advocates from across the country, reaffirmed its goal of building certification through an open and independent multi-stakeholder process. That goal is reflected in the NCC’s mission statement:

The National Coalition on Healthcare Interpreter Certification is committed to developing a valid, credible, inclusive and transparent national process to ensure competency of healthcare interpreters and improve access and quality of care for patients with limited-English proficiency in our culturally diverse communities.

As part of a two-day meeting on January 22-23 in Los Angeles, the NCC developed plans to add new organizations and individuals to its effort through participation in its working committees. Its committees are pursuing work on certification development, certification for languages of lesser diffusion, and the legal aspects of certification, beginning with the development of objective standards for the pre-qualification, training, testing, and continuing education of healthcare interpreters.

Frederick D. Hobby, President, Institute for Diversity in Health Management of the American Hospital Association, a NCC member, explained that the coalition is “working diligently to set forth a road map to ensure that quality is an integral part of the proposed certification process. The group has been very transparent in their discussions as they sort through years of literature and their own experiences to produce the most appropriate, equitable and consensus-based resource available to the thousands of bi-lingual speakers serving our nations’ patients.”

The group adopted a policy at the meeting requiring each member to submit proprietary tests and materials to the NCC for evaluation and prospective adoption of elements into a single process.

“We’re delighted that such a diverse group of organizations, each with its own interests and constituencies, has agreed to move forth. We trust the NCC will reach its ultimate goal in a more efficient and speedy fashion when member organizations are willing to commit their own proprietary tools and intellectual capital to the process. Continued collaboration and membership in the NCC will require such strong commitment,” said Elizabeth Nguyen, representative of the California Healthcare Interpreting Association (CHIA) and a member of the NCC’s Steering Committee.

As Karin Ruschke, representative of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC), also a Steering Committee member, pointed out, “We’re not out to simply review or endorse any of the existing tests or training programs. Our goal is to gather the best practices from our varied coalition members, then build on that to develop elements of an open and transparent certification process that can be adopted nationally.”

Added Kathleen Diamond of the Association of Language Companies, another NCC member, “We are deeply appreciative of the hundreds of hours that member organizations have donated to this truly collaborative effort. As a coalition of volunteers, we could not have made such steady progress towards the development of a valid and inclusive certification process without the dedication and commitment of our coalition members.”

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