

## WORK-RELATED STRESS – A PRIMARY CAUSE OF INTERPRETER BURNOUT

**I**n our last edition of The Communicator Express, we examined four keys to a successful interpreting business: attitude, organization, honesty, and skill building. In this edition, we will take a closer look at interpreters as individuals and discuss a primary cause of interpreter burnout: work-related stress.

Many folks dream of running their own businesses—they imagine a life of freedom from the demands of a supervisor or boss.

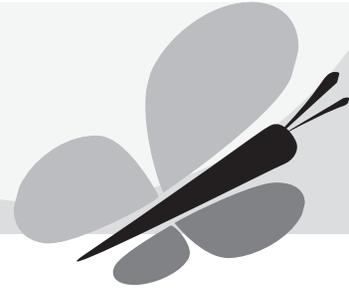
The reality of the freelance interpreter, though, is that each client organization plays the role of 'boss'. It can be said, then, that the stresses of freelance interpreting are potentially many times greater than those of a regular salaried employee.

ONE-FOURTH OF EMPLOYEES VIEW THEIR JOBS AS THE NUMBER ONE STRESS IN THEIR LIVES.  
— NORTHWESTERN NATIONAL LIFE

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Anyone who has at some point made a living in freelance interpreting can identify with the challenges of maintaining a reasonable schedule while earning what is necessary to 'pay the bills'. Most successful freelance interpreters contract with several organizations. At times, the demands of these clients overlap, and the interpreter may begin to feel 'pulled' in different directions as, in an attempt to keep everyone happy, s/he takes on more assignments than humanly manageable.

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Consider a day in the life of an interpreter we'll call Stella. Stella works with three client organizations. Stella's calendar reflects the following medical interpreting assignments, each with a two-hour minimum:

September 2007  
Daily Calendar

THURSDAY	
7:00 am	
8:00 am	
9:00 am	Somerville (Client A)
10:00 am	
11:00 am	(11:30) Dorchester (Client B)
Noon	
1:00 pm	(1:45) - Reading (Client A)
2:00 pm	
3:00 pm	
4:00 pm	
5:00 pm	
6:00 pm	(6:30) - Salem (Client C)
7:00 pm	

CAN YOU SPOT THE OVERBOOKING?

Can you spot the overbooking? Although Stella has blocked out a two-hour minimum for each assignment, she has not allotted a proper amount of time for driving from one appointment to the next. Despite knowing that it is impossible to make the 40-minute trip from Dorchester to Reading in just 15 minutes, Stella will speed down the highway in the false hope of arriving on time for the 1:45 assignment.

Early in the day, Stella received a call from Client C, who asked if she could cover a 3:30PM appointment in Woburn. Client C had been unsuccessful in assigning the case, and begged Stella to "just say yes". Stella hesitated, but then accepted the assignment. She reasoned that the Reading case will likely end before it's two-hour time allotment, and that she'll probably be able to arrive in Woburn "just a few minutes late".

The effects of Stella's overbooking are far-reaching. A quick glance at her appointment book reveals that in addition to jeopardizing road safety and client satisfaction, Stella has not set aside time in her 12-hour work day to rest or eat. During the last assignment of the day, she begins to feel faint and a bit dizzy from this dangerous combination of stress and hunger.

Interestingly, the US Department of Health and Human Services reports that four studies that focused on effects during extended shifts reported that the 9th to 12th hours of work were associated with feelings of decreased alertness and increased fatigue, lower cognitive function, declines in vigilance on task measures, and increased injuries. In fact, in 16 of 22 studies considered in the DHHS report, overtime was associated with poorer perceived general health, increased injury rates, more illnesses, or increased mortality.

Differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress. Examples of individual and situational factors that can help to reduce the effects of stressful working conditions include:

- Balance between work and personal life
- A support network of friends and coworkers
- A relaxed and positive outlook

How can an interpreter know if s/he is suffering from stress? It is important to take action at a personal level and to review your lifestyle to see if you can identify any contributing factors. A simple checklist might include:

- Do I often eat 'on the run' or in a disorganized manner?
- Am I always rushing, trying to be available to everyone?
- Do I often exceed the speed limit when traveling from one assignment to the next?
- Do I usually miss breaks?
- Do I regularly schedule time for exercise and relaxation?
- Do I allow myself adequate time for sleep (a minimum of 7-8 hours)?
- Am I smoking or drinking excessively?
- Are my clients less and less satisfied due to my tardiness or rushed performance?
- Have I lost jobs because of unsatisfactory performance?

In many cases, prolonged stress can lead to poor physical and/or mental health. If you think you are currently experiencing stress-related ill health, you may benefit from a discussion with your primary care provider.

For additional information on tips for coping with work-related stress, see:

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>
- Health and Safety Executive and Health and Safety Commission website.  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/individuals.htm>

CCCS wishes all our freelance interpreters a long and healthy career!

#### **Our sources:**

"Overtime and Extended Work Shifts: Recent Findings on Illness, Injuries, and Health Behaviors", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2004-143.

"Stress... At Work", US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

**I**N 16 OF 22 STUDIES CONSIDERED IN THE DHHS REPORT, OVERTIME WAS ASSOCIATED WITH POORER PERCEIVED GENERAL HEALTH, INCREASED INJURY RATES, MORE ILLNESSES, OR INCREASED MORTALITY.

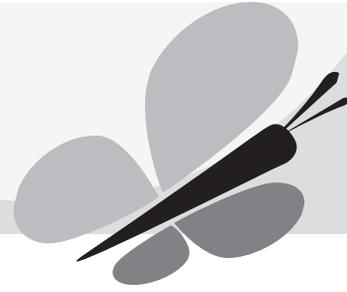
## REMINDERS FOR CCCS INTERPRETERS

Since early 2007, the CCCS Interpreter Services Department has conducted an Interpreter Portfolios Update campaign. In addition to updating documentation and immunization records, all CCCS interpreters are required to attend the 8-hour **Medical Interpreter Foundations Training (MIFT)** by November 2007. Interpreters who do not attend MIFT by December 1st will no longer receive assignments from CCCS.

These trainings have been held once a month and will continue to be held throughout the fall. Contact Gail Marinaccio at (781) 729-3736 x.106 or by email at [gmari-naccio@cccsorg.com](mailto:gmari-naccio@cccsorg.com) to reserve your seat for one of the following sessions:

- Thursday, September 27, 9AM-5PM
- Thursday, October 25, 9AM-5PM
- Saturday, November 3, 9AM-5PM
- Monday, November 19, 9AM-5PM

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## REMINDERS FOR CCCS INTERPRETERS

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### Interpreter Training Opportunities at CCCS

At CCCS, we are committed to interpreter education. This coming fall, the Cross Cultural Communication Institutes in Woburn, MA and Nashua, NH, will offer exciting new interpreter education opportunities, including the following two specialty workshops for interpreters.

#### NOTE-TAKING FOR MEDICAL INTERPRETERS

Dates: September 26, 6PM-10PM

Location: Cross Cultural Communication Systems, Inc.  
800 West Cummings Park, Suites 3800-3900  
Woburn, MA 01801

Instructor: Frank Geoffrion

In this workshop, participants will learn when to take notes and how to decide what to write. Note taking will be explored as a supplement to memory, retention and recall. The instructor will present note taking systems and techniques such as the Rozan method, as well as the use of abbreviations and symbols.

Cost is \$40 per person. For more information, contact Stefanie DiMeo, CCCI Program Coordinator  
Phone: 781-729-3736 x.111  
Email: sdimeo@cccsorg.com

### CROSS CULTURAL ISSUES AND THE CHALLENGE OF PALLIATIVE CARE AT THE END OF LIFE

Date: November 6, 6PM-10PM

Location: CCCS New Hampshire Regional Office  
43 Technology Way, Suite 2E3  
Nashua, NH 03060

For directions, see [http://www.cccsorg.com/contact/directions\\_nh.html](http://www.cccsorg.com/contact/directions_nh.html)

Instructor: Richard S. Lane, MD

This workshop will discuss the subspecialty of Palliative Care and how cross-cultural issues can arise in the practice of this work. Participants will discuss the difference between palliative medicine and hospice, and explore issues of sensitivity and competency. The group will review a complex palliative care case and see how we can move from cultural sensitivity to cultural competency in an end-of-life situation involving a patient and family from a non-dominant culture living in the United States.

Cost is \$40 per person. For more information, contact Amanda Duross, NH Regional Coordinator  
Phone: 888-678-CCCS X.120  
Email: aduross@cccsorg.com



**cross cultural communication systems, inc.**

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New Hampshire Regional Office: PO Box 733, Nashua, NH 03060

p: 1-888-678-CCCS | f: 603-386-6655

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### IMIA Conference

Most successful freelance interpreters make it a point to attend professional gatherings. A great local opportunity for instruction and networking is "Pioneering Healthy Alliances", the 11th Annual International Medical Interpreters Association Conference to be held October 5-7 in Boston. What can you expect from the IMIA Annual Conference? Among this year's highlights are educational workshops, a National Certification Forum, an expert panel on remote interpreter education, the first-ever Medical Interpreter Job Fair, film screenings, live entertainment and much more! Registration is currently open at [www.mmia.org](http://www.mmia.org).