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Dissertation Abstract


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Abstract

This study explores the current state of healthcare interpreting services for Chinese immigrants in a large hospital in Auckland, New Zealand. More specifically, it seeks to (a) investigate current practices of interpreting for Chinese patients in healthcare consultations and (b) understand the perspectives of key stakeholders (interpreters, patients, and health professionals). To that end, this essentially qualitative research combines participant observations of interpreter-mediated health professional–patient interactions and one-to-one interviews with each group of stakeholders. Data are analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic-analysis method.

Through the theoretical lens of Dean and Pollard’s (2013) demand control schema, thematic analysis of observations portrays an array of demands (challenges) that interpreters encounter and controls (resources and responses) they employ when mediating healthcare interactions. While some controls represent good practice, others appear to deviate from their prescribed professional ethics: notably, accuracy; role boundaries; and impartiality (NZSTI, 2013). Interview findings revealed several themes regarding ethical and professional practice in healthcare interpreting, including the interpreter role and role boundaries, impartiality, accuracy, cultural mediation, and interpreter competence. Findings show that patients and health professionals may not know what ethical and professional practice for interpreters entails. Often, their perceptions and expectations go beyond the interpreter’s role and ethical boundaries, posing interpersonal demands for interpreters. Interpreters, by contrast, are generally aware of their role and professional ethics. However, they may at times deviate from ethical and professional requirements as a result of patients’ and health professionals’ expectations, or their own desires to facilitate effective communication and positive relationships. To my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. It provides an empirical basis for developing strategies in training ethical and competent healthcare interpreters and raising patients’ and health professionals’ awareness of the interpreter’s role and professional ethics.