

Are Doctors Required to Provide Interpreters for Medical Visits and Other Medical-Related Situations?

The short answer is yes.

This is covered under the Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you feel that you need an interpreter in order to understand what your doctor/health care provider is telling you, then the doctor/health care provider is required to provide you with one. It is best to contact your doctor/health care provider directly and tell them, prior to your appointment, that you need an interpreter. Do not hire your own interpreter and expect the doctor/health care provider to pay your interpreter for you. You may run into problems that way.

The doctor/health care provider must pay for the cost of an interpreter, even if the cost of the interpreter is more than the cost of your visit. The doctor/health care provider is expected to handle the cost of interpreter as a normal business expense or as part of the overhead costs of operating a business.

If your doctor/health care provider tries to encourage you to bring in a signing family member or a friend as a way to "save costs", say no. Family members and friends cannot be expected to be neutral and sign everything they hear. They may be emotionally or personally involved with you and this may affect their interpreting. Using them as interpreters can also cause problems in maintaining your confidentiality as a patient.

