

# **Understanding the Healthcare Interpreter Exams of the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters (NBCMI)**

***A Reference Sheet Compiled by the Oregon Health Care Interpreters Association***

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## **Overview**

In order to become Oregon certified as a health care interpreter, a necessary requirement is taking a set of national exams (one written exam and one oral exam). These exams must be taken through either the National Board for Certification of Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) or the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI).

The NBCMI offers testing for Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese only  
The CCHI offers testing for Arabic, Mandarin, or Spanish only

*This specific resource explains the process and requirements only for the NBCMI healthcare interpreter exams. The NBCMI has two such exams: the written exam and the oral exam (both are required for Oregon certification).*

## **Oregon Certification and Qualification**

Oregon certification is only available for Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese. Other languages must instead become qualified. Receiving certification through CCHI or NBCMI does not equate to Oregon certification; there are additional requirements set by Oregon. For more information on Oregon certification and qualification, visit the Oregon Health Authority's Office of Equity and Inclusion's website: <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/oei/Pages/hci-certification.aspx>

## About the Written Exam

- Cost: **\$175** (non-refundable, must pay to re-take exam if not passed initially)
- Must have registered with the NBCMI and had your application accepted
- Exam is offered year round
- Computer-based multiple choice exam with 51 questions
- Exam administered online or at a testing center
- Length of exam is 75 minutes
- Passing score is 75%
- Exam results are given instantly
- Exam is in English only and tests for health care interpreter knowledge, not target language skills
- Knowledge tested on written exam:
  - Roles of the Medical Interpreter 8%
  - Medical Interpreter Ethics 15%
  - Cultural Competence 8%
  - Medical Terminology in Working Languages 38%
  - Medical Specialties in Working Languages 23%
  - Interpreter Standards of Practice 5%
  - Legislation and Regulations 3%

## About the Oral Exam

- Cost: **\$275** (non-refundable, must pay to re-take exam if not passed initially)
- Note: Cost is **\$235** for Oregon residents testing in a language other than Spanish
- Must have received the official results of passing the written exam
- Exam is offered year round
- Computer-based oral performance exam
- Exam administered online or at a testing center
- Length of exam is 45-60 minutes
- Results are available within 8-10 weeks (or often sooner) after taking the exam
- Exam is a test of interpreting skills, with sections in English and the target language
- Skills Tested on CHI Performance Exam:
  - Mastery of Linguistic Knowledge of English 15%
  - Mastery of Linguistic Knowledge of the other language 15%
  - Interpreting Knowledge and Skills 25%
  - Cultural Competence 10%
  - Medical Terminology in Working Languages 25%
  - Medical Specialties in Working Languages 10%
- Structure of Exam
  - 12 mini-scenarios, bi-directional interpretation (30 minutes to complete)
  - 2 sight translation passages, English to target language (10 minutes to complete)

## Process of Registering and Taking the Exams

### 1. Register for the NBCMI Exams

#### a. Make sure you meet the requirements listed below:

- i. Minimum 18 years of age
- ii. High school diploma or GED diploma
- iii. Successful completion of minimum 40 hours of health care interpreter training
- iv. *If you have worked as a health care interpreter for at least 1 year in the last 2 years for Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, or Vietnamese, then you can submit proof with a signed letter of employment on company letterhead in place of proof of language proficiency*

1. Make sure letter includes target language, hire date, and dates of employment
2. If you don't meet requirement iv (above), then you must submit proof of oral proficiency in English and the target language (below)

#### v. *Proof of oral proficiency in English by **one** of the following:*

1. Bachelor, Masters, PhD, or any other degree from any US institution of higher education
2. Graduation from any high school in an English language country or from an American School abroad
3. One of the following tests:
  - a. TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language): 570+ on paper; 230+ on computer version; 90+ on iBT
    - i. Cost TOEFL iBT: **\$190** (fees subject to change)
    - ii. Website: <http://www.ets.org/toefl>
  - b. ELPT (English Language Proficiency Test): 950+
  - c. MELAB (Michigan English Language Assessment Battery) 80+
  - d. ECPE (Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English): PASS
  - e. FCE (First Certificate in English, Level 3): A
  - f. CAE (Certificate in Advanced English, Level 4): B
  - g. CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English, Level 5): B
  - h. IELTS (International English Language Testing System): 7.0

#### vi. *Proof of oral proficiency in the target language by **one** of the following:*

1. Bachelors, Masters, PhD, or any other degree from an institution of higher education where the target language is spoken
2. Graduation from a high school of the country where the target language is spoken
3. 24+ semester college credit hours of the target language
4. ACTFL Orals Exams (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages): Advanced Mid Level
  - a. Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI): **\$139**
  - b. Oral Proficiency Interview – Computer (OPIc): **\$70**
    - i. OPIc offered only for some languages
  - c. Website: [www.language-testing.com](http://www.language-testing.com)

- vii. **Note:** The NBCMI requires that all documents submitted for proof of language proficiency be translated to English; a non-certified translation is acceptable
- b. Complete an application:
  - i. Follow all instructions at: <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/register>
  - ii. Submit the **\$35** non-refundable registration fee (this fee is waived for Oregon residents testing in a language other than Spanish)
  - iii. **Note:** Pay close attention to instructions on the website (above) for submitting via email the requirements for the exam
- c. Wait 2-4 weeks to receive a response on your application
- 2. Pay **\$175** for the written exam and schedule testing
  - a. Upon acceptance of your application, you have 6 months to pay for and schedule the exam
  - b. After application is accepted, you will receive a Candidate Information Bulletin with instructions on how to schedule the written exam at a PSI testing site; exams may be scheduled online or by telephone
  - c. The written exam is offered online or at a testing center year round
    - i. <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/written-exam>
- 3. Prepare for the written exam (see *Prepare for the NBCMI Exams* on page 5)
- 4. Attend the scheduled written exam
  - a. Results will be given instantly at the testing center or online
    - i. If you don't pass, you must wait 3 months to re-take the exam (repayment of exam fee is required for each re-take)
    - ii. There are maximum 3 re-takes allowed for the written or oral exam each year
- 5. Pay **\$275** (or **\$235** for Oregon residents testing in a language other than Spanish) and schedule the oral exam
  - a. Upon receiving results of passing the written exam, you have 6 months to pay for, schedule and take the oral exam
  - b. Upon passing the written exam, you will receive information on how to schedule online the oral exam
  - c. Once scheduled, you will receive a Candidate Admission Letter with confirmation of the testing appointment and test center policies
  - d. The oral exam is offered online or at a testing center year round
    - i. <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/oral-exam>
- 6. Prepare for the oral exam (see *Prepare for the NBCMI Exams* on page 5)
- 7. Attend the scheduled oral exam online or at a testing center
  - a. Results will be given with 8-10 weeks (or often sooner)
    - i. If you pass, your name will be added to NCBMI's registry and you will receive a paper certificate in the mail
    - ii. If you don't pass, you must wait 3 months to re-take the exam (repayment of exam fee is required for each re-take)
    - iii. There are maximum 3 re-takes allowed for the written or oral exam each year

## How to Prepare for the Exams

Visit the following links for information on preparing for the NBCMI's exams:

- Website: <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/how-prepare-certific>
- Handbook (see pages 7-8):  
<http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/sites/default/files/national-board-candidate-handbook.pdf>

## NBCMI Certification Renewal

The NBCMI requires the completion of 3 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) of approved training in the **5 years** following certification in order to maintain it. The 3 CEUs is equivalent to 30 contact hours of training (not counting meals, breaks, etc.). All continuing education must be related to interpreting skills, ability and medical knowledge

The NBCMI accepts CEUs from the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), the American Translators Association (ATA) and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). The ATA and RID CEUs must be for workshops, conferences and events related to medical interpreting knowledge and skills enhancement. All education opportunities outside of the IMIA, ATA and RID must be reviewed and evaluated by the NBCMI upon request.

The cost for certification renewal is \$300, and the application is due at least 45 days before the 5 year expiration mark.

See the NBCMI's website on renewal criteria for more details:

<http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/recertify>

## Resources

NBCMI Website: <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/>

NBCMI CMI Candidate Handbook:

<http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/sites/default/files/national-board-candidate-handbook.pdf>

**Important Note:** The NBCMI Candidate Handbook was late updated in 2014, so some of its information may not be up to date. To confirm details of the exams, please contact the NBCMI:

- Email: [info@certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org](mailto:info@certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org)
- Phone: 765-633-2378

**This reference sheet was last updated in January 2016 and is subject to change.**

**This information has been reviewed by the NBCMI for accuracy.**

*Information courtesy of the Oregon Health Care Interpreters Association*  
503-893-9660 [support@ohcia.org](mailto:support@ohcia.org) [www.ohcia.org](http://www.ohcia.org)