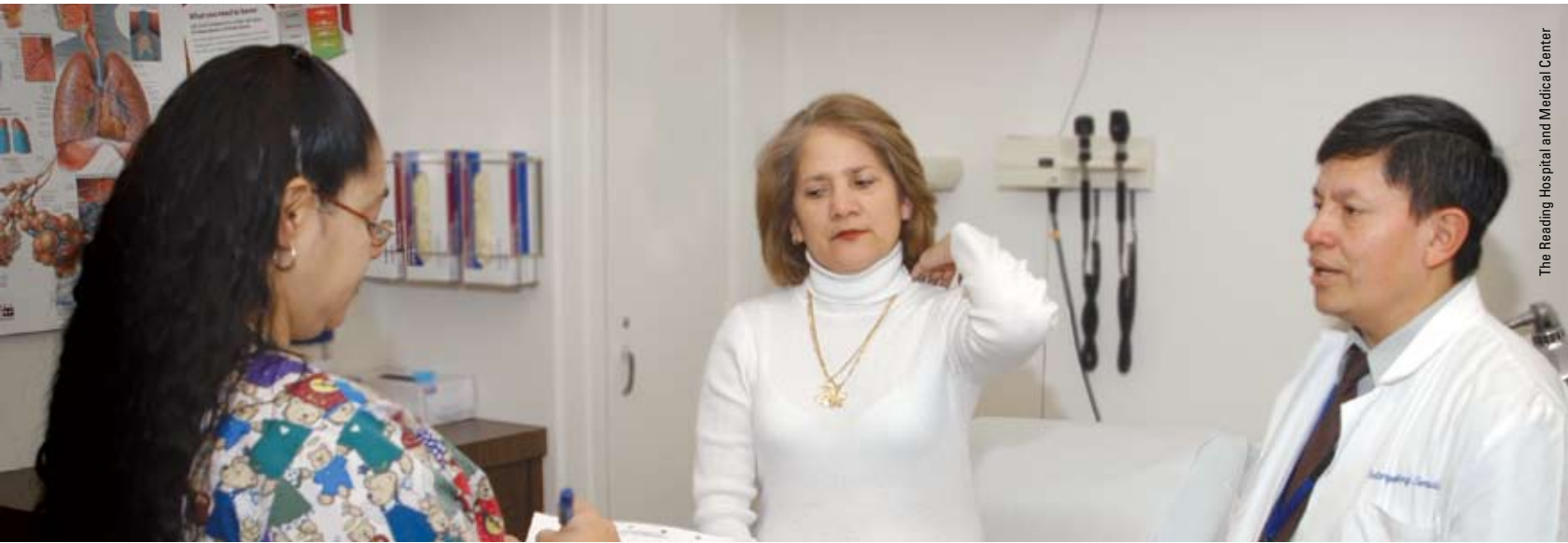


*A training program brings  
translation to a whole new level*

# *Larger Role for Interpreters*



The Reading Hospital and Medical Center

**A DOCTOR ASKED** his patient, who spoke little English, a question through an interpreter, who then engaged in a lengthy discussion with the patient. The interpreter turned to the doctor and replied, “She said ‘No.’” The doctor asked what the patient said, and the interpreter smiled and replied, “Oh, it wasn’t important. She just means ‘No.’”

This conversation underscores the critical need for more medical interpreters who can act as advocates for their limited-English language proficient clients, accurately relaying information between patient and medical personnel. “In Pennsylvania there are about 1 million people whose mother tongue is a language other than English,” says Dr. Robert Schrauf, medical anthropologist and Penn State associate professor of applied linguistics. When these individuals go to the doctor or the hospital, they want to understand the medical staff just as much as you and I do.”

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***A health care provider works with an interpreter to learn a patient's needs.***

Pennsylvania now has only one trained medical interpreter per 10,154 individuals with limited-English proficiency. Earlier training approaches involved teaching medical terminology, but it’s now evident that the interpreters should play a much larger role. To address the need for a high-quality training program of broader scope, Schrauf and Priscilla Ortiz, a medical interpreter and doctoral student in applied linguistics, designed the curriculum for Penn State’s new Health Care Interpreting Certificate Program.

### ***Complex Personal Factors***

Funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and administered by Penn State Outreach’s Continuing Education and the Department of Applied Linguistics in the College of the Liberal Arts, the initiative will be offered start-

ing this spring from the University Park campus to selected branch campuses via video-conferencing and Internet-based distance learning technologies.

Those eligible for the training include people who are already bilingual in English and at least one other language and who are currently employed in a health care setting. The course topics go a step beyond most interpreter training programs that focus on “translating” and include the complex cultural, social and psychological factors involved in helping people to understand one another.

“It is significant in that it strives to give interpreters an opportunity to reach a greater level of professionalism in their field,” said Ortiz.

Schrauf noted that the effort reflects a wider movement to provide interpreter training and to develop an appropriate national certification process.