

Name: Ilana Sherer

Profession: medical student

Number of years in this line of work: 1

Native Language: English

Other Language(s): Spanish

1) What languages do you know? How did you learn them? (At home, At school)

Spanish--learned entirely at school

2) What is your profession?

Medical student, used to be a public health worker

3) Describe a "typical" day as a public health worker. How do you use your languages in your work?

I used Spanish all the time when patients would call in or come in for help getting emergency medical assistance. I also used my Spanish at health clinics and in the emergency room helping patients who didn't have insurance get care. As a medical student, I use Spanish all the time to interpret for patients who don't speak English, and I also volunteer at a migrant health clinic that serves mostly Spanish-speaking patients, doing history and physicals and answering questions in Spanish.

4) What do you enjoy about it?

It works my brain in interesting ways, and also helps me get to know people in the language that they prefer to speak.

5) What language do you think in?

English

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language(s)?

Studying abroad in Spain and volunteering as a hospital interpreter in the US both helped.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career that you may not have had otherwise?

The opportunity to work independently, without relying on interpreters, getting selected for a job as a public health worker I may not have gotten otherwise, getting to know people without language barriers.

8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would it be? Why?

French, because it is similar enough to Spanish to make it easier, and it's the next most useful language in the developing world.

9) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned another language?

Less rich, less ability to travel independently, less career options, more dependence on translators. I am currently working in a place where I don't speak the native language and have to rely on translators. I never feel like I am really getting to know people or that I am really understanding what they are saying or the cultural context behind it when I am listening to an interpreters' version of what someone says.

10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak two or more languages?

Yes, but it depends what you want to go into. In the US, you can have lots of career opportunities even if you only speak one language.

11) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't becoming a doctor?

Probably still working in public health.

12) What advice would you give to somebody who wants to go into medicine or public health? Are there any specific languages they should learn?

Spanish is incredibly useful. Depending on where you live, Portuguese, French, Chinese, Malaysian, Arabic, and other languages are also useful, depending on the immigrant population.

13) Any additional information: