Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,
1929 - 1968
American Clergyman & Civil Rights Leader

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., graduated from Morehouse College (B.A., 1948), Crozer Theological Seminary (B.D., 1951), and Boston University (Ph.D., 1955). The son of the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King was ordained in 1947 and became (1954) minister of a Baptist church in Montgomery, Ala. He led the black boycott (1955—56) of segregated city bus lines and in 1956 gained a major victory and prestige as a civil-rights leader when Montgomery buses began to operate on a desegregated basis.

King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which gave him a base to pursue further civil-rights activities, first in the South and later nationwide. His philosophy of nonviolent resistance led to his arrest on numerous occasions in the 1950s and 60s. His campaigns had mixed success, but the protest he led in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963 brought him worldwide attention. He spearheaded the Aug., 1963, March on Washington, which brought together more than 200,000 people. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

King’s leadership in the civil-rights movement was challenged in the mid-1960s as others grew more militant. His interests, however, widened from civil rights to include criticism of the Vietnam War and a deeper concern over poverty. His plans for a Poor People’s March to Washington were interrupted (1968) for a trip to Memphis, Tenn., in support of striking sanitation workers. On Apr. 4, 1968, he was shot and killed as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel (since 1991 a civil-rights museum).

James Earl Ray, a career criminal, pleaded guilty to the murder and was convicted, but he soon recanted, claiming he was duped into his plea. Ray’s conviction was subsequently upheld, but he eventually received support from members of King’s family, who believed King to have been the victim of a conspiracy. Ray died in prison in 1998. In a jury trial in Memphis in 1999 the King family won a wrongful-death judgment against Loyd Jowers, who claimed (1993) that he had arranged the killing for a Mafia figure. Many experts, however, were unconvinced by the verdict, and in 2000, after an 18-month investigation, the Justice Dept. discredited Jowers and concluded that there was no evidence of an assassination plot.

King wrote Stride toward Freedom (1958), Why We Can’t Wait (1964), and Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (1967). His birthday is a national holiday, celebrated on the third Monday in January. King’s wife, Coretta Scott King, has carried on various aspects of his work. She also wrote My Life with Martin Luther King (1989).
Confidentiality Across Cultures

By Cynthia E. Roat, “Healthcare Interpreting in Small Bites”, continued from previous issue

It is a sign of respect to show up in support of those enjoying or suffering through life’s ups and downs. The recipient of this support does not seem to be the least concerned that everyone know the particulars of what’s going on in their life. Instead I have experienced (in my own family too) almost a sense of obligation (again from respect/social courtesy) to receive all the well-wishers and allow them even a brief visit to offer congratulations, best wishes, sympathy, prayers, etc.” - Maria Carr, personal correspondence, November 29, 2005 (reproduced with permission)

So in Maria’s point of view, her Spanish-speaking patients may seem confused by the concern about keeping everything secret, because telling appropriate people so that those people can be supportive is considered a kindness.

I found a similar point of view when training Hmong interpreters in Montana. These interpreters happened to be clan leaders in their communities. When we discussed the requirements to maintain confidentiality, they were chagrined. It was their role in the community, they explained, to let people know what was happening to the patient so that the community could offer the appropriate support. The patient could not tell anyone, as that would be considered immodest. It was the clan leader’s role to do so. In their eyes, the stricture to keep everything confidential was cruel and isolated the patient from his/her support systems.

Russian Pentecostal interpreters in this same training insisted that confidentiality was unnecessary in their interpreting because nobody in their community had anything they would want kept secret from each other. Interestingly enough, the one non-Pentecostal Russian interpreter in town told me that she was often specifically requested expressly because the patient wanted to discuss something with the doctor that he or she knew would be criticized in the community.

Indeed, it is not unusual for patients in small cultural communities to choose to use telephonic interpreters for particular medical visits specifically because those interpreters, commonly situated outside the geographic community, cannot share any information with the local community. Perhaps these patients welcome sharing information about health problems, for which there will be community support, but prefer confidentiality when the problem is one that carries a social stigma.

What can we conclude from all this, then? We need to start by realizing that the word “confidentiality” is not understood the same by all who hear it. As interpreters, we need to understand and apply confidentiality as it is understood and applied by the health care team, of which we are a part. When we mention it to patients, however, we may need to explain more fully what we mean, or use a paraphrase to describe the concept. Differing cultures will lead to differing expectations among patients about what this word means.

By explaining more clearly, we can both clarify what we mean in the moment and avoid culturally based confusions later on.

And that’s not something that should be kept secret by any of us.

World Religion Day - Baha’i

Baha’is are urged to “Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.” One way they do this is through the commemoration of World Religion Day — Sunday, January 15.

World Religion Day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States. The Assembly’s purpose was to call attention to the harmony of spiritual principles and the oneness of the world’s religions and to emphasize that religion is the motivating force for world unity.

As stated in Baha’i scripture: “religion should be the cause of love and agreement, a bond to unify all mankind for it is a message of peace and goodwill to man from God,” and “Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein.” (See The Promise of World Peace)

It is observed the third Sunday in January by Baha’is in the United States and increasingly by people around the globe, with interfaith discussions, conferences and other events that foster understanding and communication among the followers of all religions.