

Medical Transcriptionist

Medical transcriptionists are specialists in medical language and health care documentation who interpret and transcribe dictation by physicians and other health professionals regarding patient assessment, workup, therapeutic procedures, clinical course, diagnosis, prognosis, and so on, editing dictated material for grammar and clarity as necessary and appropriate.



Career Description

In the broadest sense, medical transcription is the act of translating from oral to written form (on paper or electronically) the record of a person's encounter with a health care professional. Medical transcriptionists (MTs) are specialists in medical language and health care documentation. They interpret and transcribe dictation by physicians and other health care professionals regarding patient assessment, workup, therapeutic procedures, clinical course, diagnosis, prognosis, etc, editing dictated material for grammar and clarity as necessary and appropriate.

Physicians and other health care providers employ state-of-the-art electronic technology to dictate and transmit highly technical and confidential information about their patients. These medical professionals rely on skilled medical transcriptionists to transform spoken words into comprehensive records that accurately communicate medical information.

Speech recognition systems also may be used as an intermediary to translate the medical professional's dictation into rough draft. The medical transcriptionist is on the frontline to implement risk management by further refining the draft into a finished document. This requires listening to dictation while reading the draft created via speech recognition technology and editing the text on a computer screen. This editing may range from minimal to extensive, depending on the capabilities of the speech recognition software and the dictating habits of the originator, and may include correction of content as well as punctuation, grammar, and style.

Secretarial keyboarding and *technical language editing/transcription* should not be confused. The primary skills necessary for performance of quality medical transcription are extensive medical knowledge and understanding, sound judgment, deductive reasoning, and the ability to detect medical inconsistencies in dictation. For example, a diagnosis inconsistent with the patient's history and symptoms may be mistakenly dictated. As a foremost partner in risk management, the medical transcriptionist questions, seeks clarification, verifies the information, and enters the correct information into the report.



Employment Characteristics

Medical transcriptionists use their talents in a variety of health care settings where dictation for the purpose of health care documentation requires transcription;

these include:

- Physician's offices
- Public and private hospitals
- Teaching hospitals
- Medical schools
- Medical transcription businesses
- Clinics
- Laboratories
- Pathology and radiology departments

- Insurance companies
- Medical libraries
- Government medical facilities
- Rehabilitation centers
- Legal offices
- Research centers
- Veterinary medical facilities
- Associations representing the health care industry

In addition, many MTs work from their homes as independent contractors, subcontractors, or home-based employees.

Medical transcriptionists work with physicians and surgeons in multiple specialties, as well as with pharmacists, therapists, technicians, nurses, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, and other medical personnel. All of these health care providers rely on information that is received, accurately documented, and disseminated by the medical transcriptionist.

Qualified medical transcriptionists who wish to expand their professional responsibilities may become quality assurance specialists, editors, or supervisors. Experienced medical transcriptionists may become teachers, working in schools and colleges to educate future medical transcription professionals as managers, department heads, or owners of medical transcription businesses.



Salary

Medical transcriptionists may be paid in any of a variety of ways, but chiefly by the hour, by production, or by a combination of hourly pay plus incentive pay for production.

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2007 shows that wages at the 10th percentile were \$22,160, the 50th percentile (median) at \$31,250, and the 90th percentile at \$44,070 (www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes319094.htm). For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Employment Outlook

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Employment of medical transcriptionists is projected to grow 14 percent from 2006 to 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for medical transcription services will be spurred by a growing and aging population. Older age groups receive proportionately greater numbers of medical tests, treatments, and procedures that require documentation. A high level of demand for transcription services also will be sustained by the continued need for electronic documentation that can be shared easily among providers, third-party payers, regulators, consumers, and health information systems. Growing numbers of medical transcriptionists will be needed to amend patients' records, edit documents from speech recognition systems, and identify discrepancies in medical reports.

Contracting out transcription work overseas and advancements in speech recognition technology are not expected to significantly reduce the need for well-trained medical transcriptionists. Outsourcing transcription work abroad—to countries such as India, Pakistan, Philippines, and the Caribbean—has grown more popular as transmitting confidential health information over the

Internet has become more secure; however, the demand for overseas transcription services is expected only to supplement the demand for well-trained domestic medical transcriptionists. In addition, reports transcribed by overseas medical transcription services usually require editing for accuracy by domestic medical transcriptionists before they meet US quality standards.

Speech-recognition technology allows physicians and other health professionals to dictate medical reports to a computer that immediately creates an electronic document. In spite of the advances in this technology, the software has been slow to grasp and analyze the human voice and the English language, not to mention the medical vernacular with all its complexity. As a result, there will continue to be a need for skilled medical transcriptionists to identify and appropriately edit the inevitable errors created by speech recognition systems and to create a final document.

Job opportunities will be good, especially for those who are certified. Hospitals will continue to employ a large percentage of medical transcriptionists, but job growth there will not be as fast as in other industries. An increasing demand for standardized records should result in rapid employment growth in physicians' offices, especially in large group practices.



Educational Programs

In general, MT courses take 9 to 18 months to complete. Prospective students should look for schools that emphasize excellence in medical transcription rather than those focusing on the ideas of working at home or completing a program rapidly. Accordingly, the Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDHI) recently established an education program approval process to evaluate medical transcription programs. A joint committee, the Approval Committee for Certificate Programs, (ACCP) was established by AHDHI and the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) for certifying and approving medical transcription education programs, with the first school approved in 2005. Approved programs satisfy all requirements AHDHI has established and have demonstrated a meritorious record of job placement for their graduates. These programs are highly regarded by MT employers who seek out these graduates because of their job readiness. For a list of these programs, see: www.ahdionline.org/scriptcontent/mtapproved.cfm.

When evaluating an educational program, a potential student should ask about the amount of authentic physician dictation which is used for practice and then make appropriate use of every opportunity to practice. If the dictation is not available, even the best student is unlikely to succeed. "Authentic dictation" is actually dictated by real clinicians under real circumstances; regardless how hard anyone tries to duplicate authenticity, there is something about reading that gives it a rhythm and flow that you will not encounter in real life.

In addition, one should ask whether there are real transcriptionists (preferably CMTs) teaching the transcription practice portion of the program or mentoring students through transcription practice. Real MTs bring on-the-job experience to academic studies and to transcription practice. Also, it's recommended to interview the instructors and directors of the programs to get a personal sense of rapport (or lack thereof).



Certification and Registration

The AHDHI issues two credentials and one designation:

- Registered Medical Transcriptionist (RMT)—The AHDHI offers a voluntary credentialing exam to individuals who wish to become RMTs. This exam is applicable for recent graduates of medical transcription education programs, single-specialty transcriptionists, or MTs with fewer than 2 years' experience in acute care. This exam is considered a level 1 exam. Individuals interested in this exam may not hold a CMT credential.

- Certified Medical Transcriptionist (CMT)—The AHDHI offers a voluntary certification exam to individuals who wish to become CMTs. Individuals interested in this exam should have 2 years of acute care (or equivalent) transcription experience. This exam is considered a level 2 "expert" exam.
- Fellow of AAMT (FAAMT)—This designation signifies those who have achieved a balance of successful activities in the profession that goes beyond regular transcription practice.

No educational program can offer "certification." Although a program may provide its graduates with a certificate of completion, this is not the same as either the RMT or the CMT credentials, which are achieved only through successful completion of examinations administered by Prometric for the AHDHI in electronic testing centers throughout the world. The AHDHI believes that the CMT credential should be the eventual goal for every working medical transcriptionist.



Inquiries

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Certification

Organization name/info here

Note: Adapted in part from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2008-09 Edition, Medical Transcriptionists, on the Internet at www.bls.gov/oco/ocos271.htm (visited December 8, 2008).