

Medical Transcriptionist

Job Description:

Medical transcriptionists transcribe medical dictation by listening to taped recordings. Generally physicians create the recordings to summarize their findings and actions after examining and treating patients. Other health care professionals sometimes dictate information to be used in the preparation of medical and test reports and administrative communication and correspondence to other medical providers. In fact, the preparation of electronic documentation enables information to be shared among health care providers, services, insurance companies, regulatory agencies, and patients.

The medical transcriptionist sits at a personal computer or word processor and listens to the recording using a headset. The tape can be stopped as necessary by using a foot pedal and then resumed by the same method. Although accuracy is the most important consideration, medical transcriptionists must also be able to keyboard quickly.

An emerging technological trend is speech recognition in which sound is electronically translated and a printout produced. These reports need to be reviewed, edited, corrected, and formatted by the medical transcriptionist before being sent out for review by the person who dictated the information.

Accuracy is a critical factor because medical reports communicate to other health professionals about the care and needs of the patient. Many transcribed documents become part of the patient's permanent medical file and, as such, are considered legal documents. An understanding of medical terminology and abbreviations is essential to ensure the accuracy of the content.

Medical transcriptionists can work in a variety of settings. In 2000, 80% worked in either hospitals, clinics, or physicians' offices. The remaining 20% worked in laboratories, educational institutions, transcription services, or temporary help agencies. Some experienced transcriptionists are self-employed and work from their homes. The Internet is making the transition to a home setting more efficient and practical, but the key issue of patient confidentiality has to be addressed with transmissions that travel over the Internet.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Prepare reports and various documents from dictated information using a personal computer or word processing software.
- Check reports for correct grammar and punctuation and correct any errors.
- Translate spoken medical words and abbreviations into the correct expanded forms.
- Apply knowledge of medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, treatments, and diagnostic methods to avoid making mistakes when transcribing.
- Ensure the accuracy of the reports by spotting errors and inconsistencies and checking back with the person who did the dictation.
- Make any corrections that are noted by the person who did the dictation.
- Follow the established guidelines for formatting specific documents.
- Negotiate contracts and handle the financial aspects as well as any other aspects of operating a business.

Personal Qualities:

Medical transcriptionists must be able to sit for long periods of time and block out environmental distractions while transcribing. They need to be self-disciplined, detail oriented, and able to work independently.

Physical Requirements:

Medical transcription is not physically demanding, although long periods of sitting while transcribing is tiring for some people and can result in back, neck, and eye strain. A risk in this type of work is repetitive motion injuries of the wrist, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Medical transcriptionists must have very good hearing.

Educational Requirements:

Although individuals who know medical terminology may receive on-the-job training, a more common route is to take a two-year associate degree or one-year certificate program. Many of these programs have supervised on-the-job experience as part of the learning process. Courses that are highly recommended to prepare for a career as a medical transcriptionist are anatomy, physiology, medical terminology, medical legal issues, and grammar and punctuation.

Many vocational schools, community colleges, and distance-learning programs offer training in medical transcription. Other terms that may be used to describe these programs are medical transcriber and medical stenographer.

Certification Requirements:

Voluntary certification is offered by the American Association for Medical Transcription (AAMT). To become a certified medical transcriptionist (CMT), the applicant must pass written and practical examinations. Continuing education units must be earned every three years to be recertified. Although certification is not required, it is recommended because it demonstrates competence and increases chances for employment.

Projected Outlook for this Career:

Employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2010. This predicted growth is based on the increase in the aging population and on the need to improve communication among various health care services. The greatest employment growth is anticipated to be in clinics and physicians' offices as the demand for standardized documentation increases. Advances in speech recognition technology are not expected to decrease the demand for medical transcriptionists because they will still be needed to review, correct, edit, and then create the final documents.

Job opportunities are expected to be the highest for those who earn an associate degree and/or certification from the American Association of Medical Transcription (AAMT).

Salary Information:

In 2002, the median annual income for medical transcriptionists was \$27,140, with the middle 50% earning between \$22,600 and \$32,510. There are three common methods of payment for medical transcriptionists. The first method, used primarily by large hospitals and health care organizations, is to pay for the number of hours worked. The other two methods are production-based pay and are used primarily by independent contractors and transcription services. The pay may be based on the number of lines transcribed or there may be an hourly base with incentives for production that exceeds established standards. In 2002, production-based medical transcriptionists earned 7 to 8.5 cents per line (based on a 65-character line, counting all keystrokes).

Career Ladders:

Medical transcriptionists can advance to supervisory positions, start their own home-based business, do consulting, or teach medical transcription. With increased keyboarding speed and accuracy, they can increase their earnings.

To Learn More and Prepare:

- Obtain information from the American Association for Medical Transcription.
- Explore the Web Links provided in this profile.
- Review professional journals such as MT Monthly and Perspectives of the Medical Transcription Profession.
- Conduct an informational interview or job shadow a medical transcriptionist.
- Obtain employment or a volunteer position in a health care facility.
- In high school, take science, English grammar and punctuation, computers, and word processing classes.
- Practice keyboarding skills using typing software.
- Contact medical transcription programs for information about their admission requirements and courses of study.
- Learn about how to best prepare for certification by the American Association for Medical Transcription.

Professional Organizations:

American Association for Medical Transcription (AAMT)
100 Sycamore Ave.
Modesto, CA 95354-0550
(209) 527-9620
(800) 982-2182
<http://www.aamt.org>

Web Links:

Medical Transcription Networking Center
Information and resources for medical transcriptionists. Contains lots of information about medical transcription. Find answers to all kinds of questions by clicking "FAQ" under the "Information" heading.
<http://www.mtdaily.com/>

Medical Transcription, MT.MD
Medical transcription Internet service for transcribers and clients.
<http://www.mt.md/index.htm>

ADVANCE Newsmagazine
Magazine for health information professionals.
<http://www.advanceforhim.com/>