

About Medical Transcription

**A Career in Healthcare
Documentation**



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WHAT IS A MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST?

🕒 **What does a medical transcriptionist do?**

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 healthcare professional. Medical transcriptionists (MTs) are specialists in medical language and healthcare documentation. They interpret and transcribe dictation by physicians and other healthcare 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 healthcare 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.

The electronic health record (EHR) facilitates storage of an individual's health history so that it may be accessed by physicians and other healthcare providers anywhere. The military implements the electronic health record. Primary care managers (PCMs) are able to view onscreen previous visit history and order meds and diagnostic studies in the patient's presence. In this setting, the MT and EHR play a blended role.

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.

🕒 **What personal characteristics do I need in order to become a medical transcriptionist?**

You need excellent English grammar skills, as well as a compelling interest in and knowledge of continuous new medical equipment and procedures, scientific updates, federally approved pharmaceutical products, etc., which are reflected in medical language. You need superior resource skills. You need hand-eye coordination and keen listening skills. You need reasonable computer keyboarding skills and sit for long hours, often in a high-pressure environment. Medical documents often are requested to be expedited copy. A high level of concentration for extended periods of time is also important.

Medical transcription requires a practical knowledge of medical language relating to anatomy, physiology, disease processes, pharmacology, laboratory medicine, and the internal organization of medical reports. A transcriptionist is a medical language specialist who must be aware of standards and requirements that apply to the health record, as well as the legal significance of medical transcripts. Traditional reports of patient care take many forms including histories and physical examinations, progress reports, emergency room notes, specialty consultations, operative reports, diagnostic and laboratory findings, discharge summaries, clinic notes, referral letters, and an array of documentation spanning more than 60 medical specialties. They are frequently dictated by healthcare providers for whom English is a 2nd (3rd, or greater) language.

🕒 **Where do medical transcriptionists work?**

Medical transcriptionists use their talents in a variety of healthcare settings, including doctors' 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, and associations representing the healthcare industry—wherever dictation for the purpose of healthcare documentation requires transcription. Many MTs work from their homes as independent contractors, subcontractors, or home-based employees.

🕒 **Who do medical transcriptionists work for?**

Medical transcriptionists work with physicians and surgeons in multiple specialties. They work with pharmacists, therapists, technicians, nurses, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, and other medical personnel. All of these healthcare 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, 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.

🕒 **Where can I learn more about medical transcription?**

Go to the AHDI website, <http://www.ahdionline.org>. Click on the Visitor Center > About Medical Transcription. Follow the related links of information.

HOW DO I TRAIN FOR MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION?

🕒 **What is the initial point of contact to begin MT education?**

<http://www.ahdionline.org>

The Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDI) is the recognized leader in establishing medical transcription styles, forms, and practices. It is the organization that represents MTs globally to direct the evolution of the medical transcription profession, to advance and represent the profession of medical transcription through the promotion of quality healthcare documentation. Its purpose is to set and uphold standards for education and practice in the field of medical transcription that ensure the highest level of accuracy, privacy, and security of healthcare documentation for the U.S. healthcare system in order to protect public health, increase patient safety, and improve quality of care for healthcare consumers. AHDI provides medical transcriptionists with tools to improve patient safety and quality of care.

🕒 **Which school should I go to?**

<http://www.ahdionline.org/scriptcontent/mtapproved.cfm>

There are many training programs that make big promises about their ability to prepare you for job readiness so that you can work from home and make a lot of money. The reality is that very few of those programs have done their homework about the kind of curriculum it takes to ensure the level of job readiness that the industry demands from a graduate. Despite the fact that AHDI has provided standards for MT education, there are still many MT programs online and at the community college level that are operating below those standards.

Go to the online AHDI Home Page > Visitor Center > Choosing an MT School.

This outlines the criteria AHDI considers essential to an effective educational program. You can use this information as a checklist to evaluate any of the schools you may consider.

It is recommended that prospective students look for schools whose advertising emphasizes excellence in medical transcription, rather than focusing on the ideas of working at home or completing a program rapidly.

For that reason, AHDI recently established an education program approval process to evaluate programs that teach medical transcription. A joint committee, the Approval Committee for Certificate Programs, (ACCP) was established by AHDI and AHIMA for certifying and approving medical transcription education programs. The ACCP education approval committee approved the first school in 2005. Approved programs satisfy all the requirements AHDI 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. Detailed information about approved schools is found on the AHDI website <http://www.ahdionline.org/scriptcontent/mtapproved.cfm>

The ACCP education approval program is ongoing. Visit the website frequently to note newly approved schools.

Employers in today's production-focused environment do not have the resources to hand-hold substandard graduates through a long acclimation period of on-the-job training. It is costly and time-consuming, and many employers no longer take a risk on graduates from programs that do not have a good track record of graduating job-ready MTs. Employers are now turning to the ACCP education approval process to set the standard for entry to practice. Graduates from the approved programs continue to be highly sought after by industry employers for that reason.

What should I ask when I contact a school?

Use the "Choosing an MT School" page on the AHDI website as a checklist. Add your own questions as well.

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 there, 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.

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 your academic studies and to transcription practice.

Interview the instructors and directors of the programs, the people with whom you will be interacting. Talk with them by phone and see with whom you have the best rapport. All things being equal (including the authentic dictation advice above), choose the school with whom you feel you can establish the best relationship. It's difficult to learn medical transcription under the best of conditions; it won't help at all if you find yourself in a situation where you just don't "click" with an instructor.

Is distance-learning a good idea?

Ask yourself some questions: Am I able to work independently? If I work elsewhere and/or have children, am I able to find the necessary time and privacy for uninterrupted study? Am I self-directed? Are my computer skills such that I need only minimal support? Can I establish a schedule and stick to it? Am I a critical

thinker to reason through some problems on my own? (You may not always have access to immediate feedback, even in the best of schools.)

🕒 **Why are some schools more expensive than others?**

Only a detailed comparison of education program benefits and resources can help you reasonably determine why one school may charge more than another. Again, use the “Choosing an MT School” page from the AHDI website, go item-by-item down the list and evaluate the school you've chosen. If you have more than one possible school in mind, you may want to make a spreadsheet or table and compare the responses you get from the 2 schools in question.

🕒 **How long does it take to become a medical transcriptionist?**

Generally speaking, MT courses take 9-18 months to complete. This varies with each approved school and can be best determined by reviewing the websites and curricula and interviewing the administration of each school you consider. Another subjective factor depends on how quickly you grasp the information and how many hours per day you spend pursuing your goal.

HOW DOES APPRENTICESHIP WORK?

🕒 **What is an apprenticeable occupation?**

An apprenticeable occupation is a skilled trade which possesses all of the following characteristics: It is customarily learned in a practical way through a structured, systematic program of on-the-job supervised training. It is clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout an industry. It involves manual, mechanical and technical skills and knowledge which require a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job work experience. It requires related instruction to supplement the on-the-job training. Specifically, the MT Registered Apprenticeship candidate is a graduate from an ACCP-approved school who has earned the RMT credential from AHDI. Eligible apprentices are placed with an employer as a 2-year apprentice in the area of acute care.

🕒 **Are apprentices paid?**

Yes, apprentices in Registered Apprenticeship programs earn while they learn, because they are full-time employees during their apprenticeship. A progressively increasing schedule of wages is based on the experienced worker's hourly wage of the apprentice's occupation. Generally, apprentices start at 50% of the wage an employer pays an experienced worker in that occupation (but the apprentice cannot receive less than the state minimum wage). The apprentices' wages are increased periodically throughout the apprenticeship to reflect their mastery of the occupational skills and their ability to work independently.

🕒 **Where can I find more information about the federally approved MT Registered Apprenticeship Program? www.ahdionline.org/scriptcontent/apprentice.cfm.**

Download the “Apprentice Starter Kit.”

CAN I FIND EMPLOYMENT?

🕒 **How do I find employment once I complete school?**

Medical transcription should not be viewed as a part-time job for those entering the profession for the first time. Those who commit themselves to working full time in order to build up their level of productivity are considered to be a good investment for the employer. It may be possible for an individual to scale back to part-time work after having mastered the medical language and become proficient in medical transcription technology, but it is unwise to look upon medical transcription as a part-time opportunity right out of training.

Two best sources for a job lie within yourself coupled with your school. Graduates from approved schools who demonstrate 98% accuracy in transcription are the most sought after by employers. Push yourself to excel, and work with the contacts your school has to place you. Employers are aware of the reputations the schools have and often have standing requests for their graduates, and best students often have choices where to work.

In addition to traditional employability, which abounds, the MT skill set is applicable to support alternative health practitioners, insurance companies, scientific research facilities, medical malpractice attorneys, medical society offices, private detectives, academia with science or medicine departments, biotechnology companies (research and manufacturing), forensic psychiatry, pharmaceutical industry (research, development, sales, support), medical software development, veterinary offices, managed care organizations, medical and allied health publishing entities, and many more.

🕒 **Can I work at home?**

While many medical transcriptionists do work from their homes, the opportunity to work from home is not sufficient reason to enter this challenging profession. Medical transcriptionists must be intensely focused on medical language and the importance of documenting highly sensitive patient healthcare documents and must be dedicated to quality, privacy, and accuracy in all of their efforts. Medical transcription is not “just a typing job,” but rather a professional field where only the most dedicated practitioners will be successful.

The majority of experienced MTs do work from home. However, some employers may require you to work at their facility or in their office before sending you home to work on your own. The home transcriptionist needs an excellent knowledge of the medical language, as well as the English language, and may have to make a substantial investment in reference materials and equipment. You must also possess time management skills and discipline in order to work from home. Those who provide the highest quality transcription are most likely to be successful. However, there are medical transcription service owners (MTSOs) who hire MTs and train them, providing mentors and entry-level transcription initially.

🕒 **Can I be self-employed or own my own MT business?**

The independent medical transcriptionist (IC) or medical transcription service owner (MTSO) should have an excellent knowledge of not only the medical language and the English language, but the language of business as well. You should be willing to make a substantial investment in medical reference materials and equipment. The successful independent MT will maintain a high level of quality. Federal regulations call for special security precautions when dealing with protected patient information; this may involve some expense on your part. You are cautioned that the IRS has specific regulations about home businesses and independent contractors. Be sure to seek the advice of a qualified attorney and/or tax advisor.

Also see the AHDI publication, "Tip Sheet for Becoming a Self-Employed Medical Transcriptionist," which is available on the AHDI website.

🕒 **What can I expect to be paid once educated and working as an MT?**

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.

You can find employment statistics, wage ranges, and expected growth of employment for medical transcription on the website for the Bureau of Labor . <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos271.htm>.

An annual survey is reported by *Advance Magazine for Health Information Professionals* which notes that certified medical transcriptionists earn as much as 1/3 more than their noncertified counterparts. <http://healthinformation.advanceweb.com/Main.aspx>.

WHO PROMOTES MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION?

🕒 **What professional organizations serve the needs of medical transcription?**

AHDI: Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity. To advance and represent the profession of medical transcription through the promotion of quality healthcare documentation. Participate in the development of healthcare documentation standards to protect consumer privacy and security of medical information. <http://www.ahdionline.org>

AHIMA: American Health Information Management Association. AHIMA is the premier association of health information management (HIM) professionals. AHIMA's 50,000 members are dedicated to the effective management of personal health information needed to deliver quality healthcare to the public. Founded in 1928 to improve the quality of medical records, AHIMA is committed to advancing the HIM profession in an increasingly electronic and global

environment through leadership in advocacy, education, certification, and lifelong learning. <http://www.ahima.org>

MTIA: Medical Transcription Industry Association. A not-for-profit trade association serving the needs of medical transcription companies, vendors, and health information management professionals. <http://www.mtia.com/index.cfm>

What credentials and designations are recognized by employers and peers? <http://www.ahdionline.org/scriptcontent/creddesig.cfm>

To ensure that medical transcriptionists meet professional standards of excellence, AHDI issues 2 credentials and 1 designation.

Registered Medical Transcriptionist (RMT): AHDI offers a voluntary credentialing exam to individuals who wish to become Registered Medical Transcriptionists (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): AHDI offers a voluntary certification exam to individuals who wish to become Certified Medical Transcriptionists (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): A Fellow of AAMT signifies that you have achieved a balance of successful activities in your profession that goes beyond regular transcription practice.

No educational program can offer "certification." While a program may provide its graduates with a certificate of completion, this is not the same as either the RMT (Registered Medical Transcriptionist) or the CMT (Certified Medical Transcriptionist) credentials that are recognized in the industry and achieved only through successful completion of examinations administered by Prometric for AHDI in electronic testing centers throughout the world. The CMT credential should be the eventual goal for every working medical transcriptionist.

Why are certificates, credentials, and designations desirable?

A growing number of companies in the US are recognizing the link between certified professionals and quality documentation outcomes. Many are now seeking, reimbursing, and compensating the credential in the marketplace.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of medical transcriptionists is expected to grow faster than average through the year 2014. The Bureau of Labor

Statistics also predicts a need for 5.3 million healthcare workers to fill job openings created by departures and new positions. The supply of allied health professionals is not keeping up with demand with overall enrollment in allied health educational programs declining over the last ten years. There are not enough graduates to meet the current or future demands.

The MT field is changing and you need to enter it with those expectations. MTs are accustomed to change—from manual to electric typewriters to computers, from handheld micro cassettes to digital electronic voice file transmission, from functions of editing voice recognition software to more data capture opportunities than can be imagined.

Whatever you have been exposed to as “medical transcription” will evolve significantly by the time you finish school; however, your MT skill set will be in high demand for a broad range of new roles, provided you have the *core values of excellence, integrity, passion and work ethic* to go along with it. The “cream of the crop,” most capable MTs are on the leading edge to perform as accuracy analysts, auditors, records editors, correctionists, abstractors, and other designations as the market demands.