Overview

A medical transcriptionist listens to a voice recording made by a doctor or other healthcare professional and translates the information into a captured electronic record. MTs produce reports that become part of the medical record, including medical histories, discharge summaries, physical examination reports, operating room reports, diagnostic imaging studies, consultation reports, autopsy reports, referral letters and other documents.

These reports are important because they serve as foundation for ongoing clinical decision-making, continuity of care, maximized reimbursement, and risk management.

Transcribing medical reports is highly detailed work that requires patience, focus, and attention to detail. The transcriptionist needs extensive knowledge of medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, medical procedures, pharmacology and other medical terms. MTs apply advanced clinical knowledge to the art of accurately interpreting and capturing patient care encounters, a skill set that must be applied in the challenging setting of enabling technologies, an expansive and constantly evolving medical language, and an often unpredictable array of practitioners who dictate in haste or speak English as a second language.

Transcriptionists don’t just record the exact words the doctor says. They turn phrases and notes into complete, grammatically correct sentences. They format information according to guidelines for medical records. And they often find and question inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the doctor’s verbal report. Doctors come to rely on their transcriptionists to help ensure the accuracy and completeness of their medical reports.

Some transcriptionists use voice recognition software to aid in the initial oral-to-written transcription. However, these drafts must be carefully proofed against the original recording to ensure accuracy. Further editing is always required to produce a comprehensive and accurate report.

Transcriptionists also keep reference materials close at hand, whether in print form or online. They frequently consult medical dictionaries, procedural guides, coding manuals, diagnostic guides and style manuals.

Accuracy is critical. Once the transcriptionist prepares a first draft of the report, the doctor reviews and edits the copy to clarify and correct the information. The transcriptionist then revises the report, incorporating the doctor’s changes. This process may be repeated to ensure that the final report is as clear and complete as possible.

Because medical records are confidential, transcriptionists cannot discuss the content of the reports they prepare, and they must be careful to keep all recordings, paper and electronic files
secure. Today, most files are sent online, making security, backup storage, and virus protection a paramount concern.

Compensation models can vary from an hourly rate to a per-unit incentive model to some combination of both, with some kind of incentive program being the most common scenario you will encounter.

Job growth is solid, because the healthcare industry is growing. As the baby boomer generation moves into the long-term healthcare spectrum (creating greater patient volume in the US healthcare system) and boomer MTs retire from practice, industry experts predict a critical shortage of documentation workers to meet the evolving demands of healthcare.

While Speech Recognition Technology (SRT) is rapidly changing the role of the medical transcriptionist, this automating technology is being used primarily in healthcare as a productivity-enhancement tool for MTs, medical transcription services, and healthcare facilities which has created a new hybrid role for traditional MTs — speech recognition editor. Most industry experts agree integrating SRT with an informed knowledge worker will continue to be the best documentation solution for healthcare.

Another factor driving growth for this career is the movement towards digitizing all medical records. President Obama has promised funding toward establishing electronic medical records for all patients, which would involve transcribing all paper-based charts into electronic files.

**Working Conditions**

Many medical transcriptionists work as independent contractors or part-time employees, often working in their own homes. Others are employed in medical offices and may spend part of their time performing office duties in addition to transcription.

Transcriptionists work with every type of healthcare provider, including doctors, nurses, physical therapists, dietitians, and other health workers.

Transcriptionists spend the majority of their time sitting in front of a computer screen. They use a headset to listen to their computer or another device that plays back digital voice recordings. A key command or foot pedal may be used to pause and restart the recording as the transcriptionist keys the words into an electronic file.

Transcriptionists are at risk of work-related injury, including repetitive motion injuries, eye strain, neck and back pain and other problems related to the nature of their work. There can be pressure to produce reports quickly, as well, along with stress associated with ensuring that every report is complete and accurate.

Transcriptionists who work in an office typically put in a standard 40-hour week. Self-employed workers may choose to work longer hours, including evenings and weekends, to increase their income, meet deadlines and balance work and family responsibilities.

**Academic Requirements**
Medical transcriptionists need to be able to type accurately and quickly. However, the greatest learning curve for this career is in mastering complex medical terminology. In fact, many transcriptionists prefer to be called “medical language specialists,” because they are so well versed in medical terminology.

To be able to identify, spell and use the appropriate expanded form of thousands of medical terms, acronyms, abbreviations, and codes, transcriptionists study medical language, anatomy and physiology, disease processes, laboratory terminology, medical procedures, instruments, equipment, pharmacology and other words frequently used in medical reports. They build a library of reference books and online databases, which they use frequently throughout their career.

Transcriptionists also must have a command of English grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Computer skills are important, as well.

Training is available at many community colleges, vocational schools, and online education programs. Candidates seeking a credible education in medical transcription should select a program that has met the industry benchmarks for transcription training. The Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDI) and the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) provide oversight and approval of industry training programs in medical transcription and medical coding. Schools that have met this rigorous evaluation process can be found on the AHDI Approved Schools list.

Schools and technical programs that have met the standards for approval offer training programs of typically 10 months to 2 years in length. Graduates from approved schools are generally better prepared to sit for the Registered Medical Transcriptionis (RMT) credential, a benchmark which demonstrates job-readiness to industry employers.

Two or more years of acute care transcription experience further qualifies you to take the exam for Certified Medical Transcriptionist (CMT) credentialing. Continuing education is recommended, as medical terminology and transcription technology are constantly evolving.

### Professional Associations

[Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity](http://ahdi.org) (AHDI)

### Enrichment Programs

Search for enrichment programs in this field

### Schools and Academic Programs

Search for academic degree and certificate programs in this field

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