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# Medical Transcriptionists

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(O\*NET 31-9094.00)

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## Significant Points

- Job opportunities will be good.
- Employers prefer medical transcriptionists who have completed a postsecondary training program.
- Many medical transcriptionists telecommute from home-based offices.
- About 41 percent worked in hospitals, and another 29 percent worked in offices of physicians.

## Nature of the Work

Medical transcriptionists listen to dictated recordings made by physicians and other health care professionals and transcribe them into medical reports, correspondence, and other administrative material. They generally listen to recordings on a headset, using a foot pedal to pause the recording when necessary, and key the text into a personal computer or word processor, editing as necessary for grammar and clarity. The documents they produce include discharge summaries, medical history and physical examination reports, operative reports, consultation reports, autopsy reports, diagnostic imaging studies, progress notes, and referral letters. Medical transcriptionists return transcribed documents to the physicians or other health care professionals who dictated them for review and signature or correction. These documents eventually become part of patients' permanent files.

To understand and accurately transcribe dictated reports, medical transcriptionists must understand medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, diagnostic procedures, pharmacology, and treatment assessments. They also must be able to translate medical jargon and abbreviations into their expanded forms. To help identify terms appropriately, transcriptionists refer to standard medical reference materials—both printed and electronic; some of these are available over the Internet. Medical transcriptionists must comply with specific standards that apply to the style of medical records and to the legal and ethical requirements for keeping patient information confidential.

Experienced transcriptionists spot mistakes or inconsistencies in a medical report and check to correct the information. Their ability to understand and correctly transcribe patient assessments and treatments reduces the chance of patients receiving ineffective or even harmful treatments and ensures high-quality patient care.

Currently, most health care providers transmit dictation to medical transcriptionists using either digital or analog dictating equipment. The Internet has grown to be a popular mode for transmitting documentation. Many transcriptionists receive dictation over the Internet and are able to quickly return transcribed documents to clients for approval. Another increasingly popular method uses speech recognition technology, which electronically translates sound into text and creates drafts of reports. Transcriptionists then format the reports; edit them for mistakes in translation, punctuation, or grammar; and check for consistency and any wording that doesn't make sense medically. Transcriptionists working in specialties, such as radiology

or pathology, with standardized terminology are more likely to use speech recognition technology. However, speech recognition technology will become more widespread in all specialties as the technology becomes more sophisticated, that is, better able to recognize and more accurately transcribe diverse modes of speech.

Medical transcriptionists who work in physicians' offices may have other office duties, such as receiving patients, scheduling appointments, answering the telephone, and handling incoming and outgoing mail. Medical secretaries, discussed in the statement on secretaries and administrative assistants elsewhere in the *Handbook*, also may transcribe as part of their jobs.

**Work environment.** The majority of these workers are employed in comfortable settings, such as hospitals, physicians' offices, transcription service offices, clinics, laboratories, medical libraries, government medical facilities, or their own homes. Many medical transcriptionists telecommute from home-based offices.

Workers usually sit in the same position for long periods. They can suffer wrist, back, neck, or eye problems due to strain and risk repetitive motion injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. The constant pressure to be accurate and productive also can be stressful.

Many medical transcriptionists work a standard 40-hour week. Self-employed medical transcriptionists are more likely to work irregular hours—including part time, evenings, week-ends, or on call at any time.



*Medical transcriptionists listen to recordings on a headset, key the text into a personal computer or word processor, and edit for grammar and clarity.*

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Postsecondary training in medical transcription is preferred by employers; writing and computer skills also are important.

**Education and training.** Employers prefer to hire transcriptionists who have completed postsecondary training in medical transcription offered by many vocational schools, community colleges, and distance-learning programs.

Completion of a 2-year associate degree or 1-year certificate program—including coursework in anatomy, medical terminology, legal issues relating to health care documentation, and English grammar and punctuation—is highly recommended, but not always required. Many of these programs include supervised on-the-job experience. Some transcriptionists, especially those already familiar with medical terminology from previous experience as a nurse or medical secretary, become proficient through refresher courses and training.

Formal accreditation is not required for medical transcription programs. However, the Approval Committee for Certificate Programs (AACCP)—established by the Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDI) and the American Health Information Management Association—offers voluntary accreditation for medical transcription programs. Although voluntary, completion of an ACCP approved program may be required for transcriptionists seeking certification.

**Certification and other qualifications.** The AHDI awards two voluntary designations, the Registered Medical Transcriptionist (RMT) and the Certified Medical Transcriptionist (CMT). Medical transcriptionists who are recent graduates of medical transcription educational programs, or have fewer than 2 years experience in acute care, may become a registered RMT. The RMT credential is awarded upon successfully passing the AHDI level 1 registered medical transcription exam. The CMT designation requires at least 2 years of acute care experience working in multiple specialty surgery areas using different format, report, and dictation types. Candidates also must earn a passing score on a certification examination. Because medicine is constantly evolving, medical transcriptionists are encouraged to update their skills regularly. RMTs and CMTs must earn continuing education credits every 3 years to be re-certified. As in many other fields, certification is recognized as a sign of competence.

Graduates of an ACCP approved program who earn the RMT credential are eligible to participate in the Registered Apprenticeship Program sponsored by the Medical Transcription Industry Association through the U.S. Department of Labor. The Registered Apprenticeship program offers structured on-the-job learning and related technical instruction for qualified medical transcriptionists entering the profession.

In addition to understanding medical terminology, transcriptionists must have good English grammar and punctuation skills and proficiency with personal computers and word processing

software. Normal hearing acuity and good listening skills also are necessary. Employers usually require applicants to take pre-employment tests.

**Advancement.** With experience, medical transcriptionists can advance to supervisory positions, home-based work, editing, consulting, or teaching. Some become owners of medical transcription businesses. With additional education or training, some become medical records and health information technicians, medical coders, or medical records and health information administrators.

### Employment

Medical transcriptionists held about 98,000 jobs in 2006. About 41 percent worked in hospitals and another 29 percent worked in offices of physicians. Others worked for business support services; medical and diagnostic laboratories; outpatient care centers; and offices of physical, occupational, and speech therapists, and audiologists.

### Job Outlook

Employment of medical transcriptionists is projected to grow faster than the average; job opportunities should be good, especially for those who are certified.

**Employment change.** 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 U.S. quality standards.

### Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016		Change, 2006-16	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Medical transcriptionists.....	31-9094	98,000	112,000	13,000	14	

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

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, and the medical vernacular with all its diversity. 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 prospects.** 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.

### Earnings

Wage-and-salary medical transcriptionists had median hourly earnings of \$14.40 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$12.17 and \$17.06. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.22, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.15. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of medical transcriptionists were:

Medical and diagnostic laboratories .....	\$15.68
General medical and surgical hospitals.....	14.62
Business support services .....	14.34
Outpatient care centers.....	14.31
Offices of physicians.....	14.00

Compensation methods for medical transcriptionists vary. Some are paid based on the number of hours they work or on the number of lines they transcribe. Others receive a base pay per hour with incentives for extra production. Employees of transcription services and independent contractors almost always receive production-based pay. Independent contractors earn more than do transcriptionists who work for others, but independent contractors have higher expenses than their corporate counterparts, receive no benefits, and may face higher risk of termination than do wage-and-salary transcriptionists.

### Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations also type, record information, and process paperwork. Among these are court reporters; human resources assistants, except payroll and timekeeping; receptionists and information clerks; and secretaries and administrative assistants. Other workers who provide medical support include medical assistants and medical records and health information technicians.

### Sources of Additional Information

For information on a career as a medical transcriptionist, contact:

➤ Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130, Modesto, CA 95356.

Internet: <http://www.ahdionline.org>

State employment service offices can provide information about job openings for medical transcriptionists.