



# Employment

BY

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**Open Letter Series**  
***AHDI Board of Directors***  
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Dear Colleagues,

As the medical transcription industry faces the prediction of extinction by EHR vendors and other healthcare experts, an aging workforce, the pressures of compensation, and the need for updated skills and knowledge, we are still alive and well. There are still many ways that our sector is valuable to the healthcare delivery team. MTs are uniquely positioned just by virtue of the fact that we know the language of medicine. How many EHR vendors can claim that? With a slight retooling of our skills, we are poised to continue to provide documentation services to healthcare for the foreseeable future.

So what are some of the specific issues facing the working MT today?

### **Workforce Development**

How do we develop a workforce that is expected to have experience, when there are very few employers willing to provide that experience? The registered apprenticeship program started by AHDI and MTIA never did gain enough momentum to “get off the ground.” However, there are some smaller MTSOs in the marketplace that are willing to hire new graduates and give them the valuable experience they need. I must interject a word of warning, however – these MTSOs usually will only hire new graduates from ACCP-approved schools, as these schools have demonstrated a competent program using a proven curriculum. It is also my personal opinion that, as the transcription workforce ages and retires, MTSOs will have little choice but to hire new graduates and develop some type of mentoring program.

### **Emerging Technologies**

There is no doubt that technology is changing – and changing rapidly. In many cases, technology is evolving at a pace that makes it impossible to predict. Just as MTs transitioned from typewriters to computers, today’s documentation specialists will need to transition to emerging technologies such as speech recognition technology (editing), as well as more complex documentation capture and delivery platforms such as EHR operation. Tomorrow’s documentation specialist will need a stronger technical background than is needed today.

In response to this need, AHDI’s Credentialing Development Team recently released significant changes to our credentialing exams, incorporating health information technology competencies into both the RMT and CMT exams. AHDI content experts developed a curriculum for speech recognition editing, and now that course is offered in partnership with TRSi and 3M. In addition, a task force of educators from our Educators Alliance are working to revise the model curriculum to strengthen core competency requirements in health information technology and SRT editing, and we anticipate that such a revision to the curriculum will also result in updated requirements for education program approval. Those currently working in the MT field could research local community colleges or online programs for information technology courses.

### **Workforce Nearing Retirement**

It should come as no surprise that the average age of medical transcriptionists is increasing. For many years, there was no formal training, and new MTs simply picked up the profession on the job. However, with the proliferation of medical transcription education programs within the

last decade, we have seen the next generation of documentation specialists emerge. Through my partnership with the New Professionals Alliance, I have found that, for the most part, this next generation workforce is more technologically savvy, is eager to connect to others in the field via a professional association (specifically AHDI), and is organized and intelligent.

### **Commoditization of Transcription Services**

As medical transcription moved to a production-based industry (both in employee pay and charge for services), we have become a commodity. Truly, medical transcription is a value-added service, taking a provider's spoken dictation, cleaning it up, checking for errors (some critical and life-threatening), and producing a document that can be shared with other providers, ensuring safe, effective continuity of patient care. However, when "the powers that be" (in other words, the *financial* powers) see these documents as nothing more than an output of lines, then we have transitioned from value-add service to commodity, to be bought and sold at the market price.

How do we turn this around? This is not an easy question to answer. To begin with, someone in a decision-making role must see our value. What will it take for this to happen? A lawsuit poorly defended by incomplete or inaccurate documentation? A patient's death due to an error generated by point-and-click direct entry or front-end speech recognition that could have been identified and corrected by a critically thinking human? It is truly unfortunate to think that someone may lose his or her life before the healthcare delivery team realizes our importance.

I believe the best each of us can do is to improve our skill set, incorporating more technology information, learning as many new platforms and systems as we can, and making these skills known to our employers. Medical transcription requires a very unique and very complex set of skills. Each of us has the ability to expand those skills to enter the brave new world of healthcare documentation before us.



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