

A 6-Part Guide to Streamlining Medical Transcription

Introduction

The role of medical transcription is changing as the world changes around it. In the past 5 to 10 years, we've experienced many new opportunities in medical records creation and management, such as movement toward the electronic medical record (EMR), opportunities for outsourcing labor across the globe, and the anywhere/anytime access of the Internet. At the same time, we've had new constraints; in particular, spiraling health care costs, tighter reimbursement demands, a shrinking pool of domestic medical transcriptionists (MTs), rising documentation requirements, and new regulations on patient privacy.

There are as many options available to help health care organizations update their medical transcription processes, as there are reasons for doing so. For some, the cost pressures are the driving motive. For others, the need to integrate with an EMR vision is paramount. Other hospitals or physician groups are simply struggling to stay on top of rising transcription demand. For everyone, the goal is to find a streamlined medical transcription process that delivers high quality output, supports patient care, and does not disrupt clinicians' workflow.

What does streamlining mean to you? Here's a checklist that may help you better understand and prioritize your organization's needs. It includes the top six considerations that are on the minds of the CIOs, HIM Directors, Transcription Supervisors, Clinicians, and others involved with medical records management with whom we at eScripton speak every day. We hope that it will help you identify your most pressing challenges, and provide insight into how a Computer Aided Medical Transcription (CA-MT) solution from eScripton could benefit your health care organization.

Your Transcription Streamlining Checklist

1—Costs

How to cut them?

The labor-intensive costs for traditional typing of medical dictations have become a heavy burden for many health care organizations. There is urgency among CFOs, CIOs, and others to find a better, less expensive way to handle the task. Further, as HIM Directors and Transcription Supervisors know full well, there are costs *beyond* labor fees to consider when analyzing transcription services: costs of training, costs of management, and costs of ‘fixing’ the human error that occurs in any manual process.

Outsourcing – both domestic and offshore – has addressed cost issues for many health care organizations. For organizations with fluctuating transcription demands, outsourcing has worked well to handle ‘overflow’ needs. Yet, many HIM Directors and IT Managers have also found hidden costs in managing multiple Medical Transcription Service Organizations (MTSOs) and in integrating the multiple system interfaces that are associated with them.

Technology solutions that automate traditionally manual processes like typing can be very valuable for saving costs in medical transcription. The savings realized through Computer Aided Medical Transcription (CA-MT) technology from eScripton arise from the fact that it is faster to edit than to type. Powerful speech processing technology produces accurate, fully formatted first draft documents that MTs quickly review and edit. Many eScripton customers have determined that MTs who edit can do so in half the time it takes them to type dictations from scratch. As a result of the productivity gains, these organizations have saved hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars per year on medical transcription. (Customer stories on the eScripton website provide details.)

When a health care organization implements a CA-MT solution that increases productivity, the resulting cost savings are derived from one or more of the following:

- **paying less per line for editing versus typing transcriptions**
- **reducing or eliminating outsourced transcription for ‘overflow’**
- **lowering internal hiring plans**

In addition, large health care organizations that have an opportunity to streamline medical transcription across multiple departments, specialties, and affiliated entities such as

clinics, have a tremendous opportunity to leverage the technology investment, and realize significant savings and accelerated R.O.I.

2—Turnaround Time

Are you delivering what's expected?

With an increase in transcription demand at many health care organizations, turnaround time (TAT) has become a growing problem. Longer TAT has negative implications for patient care and medical reimbursement, which is critical to the smooth operation of every institution. As noted in a Health Care Technology report (For Health Care Institutions: What You Should Know About the New World of Medical Transcription, 7/17/04), “Hospitals are now recognizing that clear, well documented, accurately transcribed, and timely document preparation and management in conjunction with clinical information is the path to quality care and appropriately funded services.”

‘Staffing up’ or adding outsourced MTs is one way to address higher than expected TAT. Alternatively, your organization can implement technologies to make the transcriptionists you are currently using more efficient and productive. For example, word expansion programs help MTs type faster by automatically completing words after the MT has typed a keystroke or two.

eScript customers have also achieved dramatic results in terms of improved TAT, in some cases reducing TAT from days to hours. In addition, because the speech processing models that deliver first draft documents are continually being improved, an organization’s TAT continues to improve as well.

3—Clinician Priorities

How can you meet them?

Clinician priorities in medical dictation and transcription fall into three primary categories: ease of use, speed and quality.

From the **ease-of-use** perspective, clinicians typically want familiarity and convenience in the dictating interface. This does not mean that clinicians are against new ways of doing things. However, there is a high priority on front-end interfaces that can mimic existing systems, and that do not require clinicians to change their behavior or speaking patterns in any way. For example, many clinicians are accustomed to dictating with

templates or ‘normals.’ Sophisticated dictation/transcription systems enable speech-activated handling of these same types of commands.

There are, of course, advances in technology that necessitate a change in behavior, and for some clinicians that change may be a trade off that they are willing to make. (Yet, as many HIM Directors can attest, it can be difficult to get some clinicians to change their behavior, even when they say they will!) Some clinicians are now dictating with handheld devices that accept input via speech or by keying in data. Others use ‘front-end’ speech recognition that produces documents instantly, but requires ‘self-editing.’

From the **speed** perspective, clinicians are increasingly interested in taking advantage of secure Web-based technology to streamline patient care day to day. New online capabilities let clinicians view charts instantly, make updates, and electronically sign documents. “Finding ways to cost-effectively enable physicians and staff to access their dictation documents in secure, multiple locations is becoming an essential service that sophisticated MT vendors are making available to their clients.” (Health Care Technology) Further, with faster TAT for transcribed documents, clinicians can be better prepared for urgent decision-making and treatment.

From the **quality** perspective, clinicians and administrators alike stand firm. Quality documents are, in many ways, the backbone of the health care organization’s operations. Quality documents ensure that clinicians have the medical information they need and that treatment is correctly recorded. Quality documents smooth the way for prompt billing and reimbursement; they protect against legal claims; and they enable health care organizations to comply with HIPAA regulations routinely and efficiently.

From the transcription ‘checklist’ perspective, understand that clinicians generally do share the same high-level goals as HIM personnel: streamlining medical transcription and lowering costs. As users, they have a variety of other priorities, which any upgraded transcription system must take into account.

4—EMR

Can your vendor fit in?

The University of North Carolina (UNC) Medical Center has been moving toward the electronic medical record (EMR) for more than ten years. For that leading health care organization, the EMR is the continually evolving foundation for all of its health

information systems, including medical transcription. As the HIM leadership looked to integrate a more cost-effective approach to medical transcription, it was absolutely imperative that the technology solution they selected could be integrated both with their infrastructure today and with their vision for tomorrow.

“For those hospitals dealing with new EMRs, they must quickly recognize that their choice of MT vendor or partner requires review of not only quality, but also an assurance that the company is truly technology savvy.” (Health Care Technology)

Experts agree that **the transcription process will evolve with EMR** as it is implemented in health care organizations. Through advanced technology and sophisticated integrations, medical transcription will continue to be a critical component for providing accurate, timely, and non-paper-based information into an organization’s EMR system.

In the meantime, be on the lookout for advanced dictation/transcription systems that are already providing useful capabilities that mirror those in tomorrow’s EMR. Through secure, Web-based technology, for example, these systems are giving clinicians access to current, relevant medical information that supports them in practice every day.

5—MTSOs and In-house MTs

How to maintain control and maximize value?

The work of medical transcription is increasingly in the hands of outsourced MTSOs that employ labor both domestically and offshore. Many HIM Directors are drawn to the benefits an MTSO approach provides in terms of cost flexibility, external ownership of training, personnel management, etc. Yet, when using MTSOs, HIM Directors also typically want a degree of ‘control’ over the outsourced service.

For example, they want to be able to track line counts independently. If the MTSO is using CA-MT technology and handling both editing and typing, they want to be able to view the amounts of each. Also, if need be, HIM Directors want to be able to change MTSOs without disruption, to achieve a better price, better service or better quality output.

To address these common concerns, eScription provides secure, Web-based access to comprehensive, analytical reports of day-to-day MTSO activity, as part of its complete solution. The reports help administrators maintain control and independence, with an eye on productivity trends, current costs, and cost projections over time. In addition, to track

quality, an audit trail lets HIM Directors review individual MT work and any changes made to documents.

For health care organizations with in-house transcriptionists, **maximizing MT productivity and value** is a top demand. Cost pressures are forcing managers to make the most out of lean resources, while at the same time it is becoming increasingly difficult to hire qualified, local MTs should one need to be replaced. One Transcription Supervisor described the unusual challenge: “Even if I could afford to hire more MTs, I wouldn’t be able to find them.”

Jefferson Howe, President of the American Association of Medical Transcription comments that “Using technology to our advantage will allow us to be as efficient and productive as possible. When we are most efficient, we have saved time and energy that can be devoted to matters of quality.” (Journal of AAMT, April 2004). CA-MT technology, which requires MTs to review and edit draft documents produced with advanced speech recognition, is one way for MTs to participate in delivering quality documentation within a highly efficient production model.

As noted in an AHIMA Practice Brief (Speech Recognition in the Electronic Health Record, May 28, 2004), “Transcriptionists are poised to grow into evolving clinical data specialists, data quality managers, and decision support specialists, as envisioned by AHIMA’s Vision 2006 initiative.” Today, through complementary technologies that handle routine tasks such as typing, or provide efficient workflow management, forward-looking health care organizations can maximize the value of MTs – whether outsourced or in-house. Keep in mind that user training will be a key component of any new solution to make MTs and Transcription Administrators more productive and effective as their roles evolve.

6—Integration potential

What are your needs today and tomorrow?

Medical dictation and transcription is only one aspect of medical records creation and management. That is why CIOs and other technology decision makers are also paying close attention to the ability of new dictation and transcription solutions to integrate with current and new health care information systems. Across the country, health care organizations are at varying stages of technological sophistication with regard to dictation and transcription services, and with related medical records systems such as EMR.

Yet, everyone involved with making or influencing transcription decisions is aware that smart integration can lead to increased efficiencies and productivity gains down the road.

“The questions being asked [of vendors] include not only can you provide fast, accurate, timely transcription, but can you help us build a better operating and document management system, can you handle HL7, can you provide the interface, can you provide distributed access to documents, and how about electronic signatures?” (Health Care Technology)

The ability for vendors to streamline often-complex interface requirements can be of enormous value. For example, since implementing a solution from eScription, one leading hospital reported that interface errors of transcribed reports decreased from 5% to 0.2%, a more than 20-fold improvement.

Any dictation/transcription solution your organization selects should be able to be seamlessly integrated with your other systems, both human and electronic. Because technology will continue to advance, you should be sure that any solution you implement is designed with open standards allowing full and far-reaching integration as required.

In Conclusion

Streamlining medical transcription is a goal embraced by the health care industry and the organizations that comprise it. There are many alternatives for addressing the high priority challenges and for achieving the potential that new approaches will afford.

The success of CA-MT from eScription comes from the fact that it achieves just the right balance for health care organizations. It is state-of-the-art technology, proven to deliver substantial cost savings and reduced TAT. It enhances the productivity and value of MTs, and does not interfere with clinician workflow. It is designed to work in conjunction with other health care information systems to deliver quality output without compromise, in a highly efficient way.

For a free consultation, please contact eScription. We are dedicated to the goal of streamlining medical transcription – in the ways that are most meaningful to your organization – and look forward to helping you get started today.