Facts about speech recognition technology

Leaders in the medical transcription industry are seeking ways to adapt the role of medical transcriptionists to changing methods and technology.

What is speech recognition?
Speech recognition is an alternative to traditional methods of interacting with a computer. It allows a person to speak into a microphone attached to a computer; the computer is then enabled to interpret the speech into readable words.

The relationship between speech recognition and medical transcription
Speech recognition is not a new technology and it is not the only method of health information documentation. It is an increasingly relevant form of documentation as both front-end and back-end technologies continue to improve. Back-end Speech Recognition (BESR) has enjoyed significantly increasing adoption over the past five years, so much so that the two associations defined by healthcare documentation, MTIA and AHDI, have reengineered themselves to be identified with this method of documentation as a core competency, which has led to this very initiative.

According the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare documentation industry is projected to grow by 25% over the next 10 years. Documentation compliance reform and an aging baby boomer population alone give support to that forecast. To meet this demand the apparent prevailing blend of documentation methods will include traditional transcription, back-end speech recognition, front-end speech recognition (FESR), and direct EMR-based documentation.

Where labor is concerned, much is now going offshore because the U.S. labor supply of qualified documentation personnel is not meeting demand.

Leaders in the medical transcription industry are seeking ways to adapt the role of medical transcriptionists to the changing methods, as reflected by the name change of AAMT (American Association for Medical Transcription) to AHDI (Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity). Contrary to popular belief, evolving technologies do not threaten the need for MTs, but simply evolve their role.

Traditional transcription will have its place for the foreseeable future simply because not everyone is excited about change for variety of reasons. However, FESR, BESR and direct EMR documentation continue to shrink the footprint of traditional transcription. In fact, it is the recommendation of this task force that an initiative to capture and trend metrics on documentation market share.

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While FESR may have a limited role in the world of medical transcription, in the legal sector as an alternative to court reporting, voice writers (stenomask writers) have found application by repeating testimony into a device that uses FESR to convert their speech to text. With healthcare documentation, the FESR process is typically edited by the dictating clinician, but can alternatively be edited by a medical transcriptionist.

When adopted effectively BESR depends on the human intelligence of the medical transcriptionist to improve efficiencies while maintaining quality (a factor in risk management). BESR technology also introduces structured data which has benefits to EMR data management, process automation and decision support.

EMRs designed with medical transcriptionist portals support narrative dictation and allow medical transcriptionists to provide services such as sending correspondence, keying ICD9 codes and other EMR-based tasks typically reserved for clinical staff.
The progression of speech recognition

Medical transcriptionists are poised to evolve into clinical data, data quality, and decision support specialists.

The role of human intelligence

As the medical transcription industry retools for these types of services, consumers that understand how to harvest this resource and incorporate it into the value chain of healthcare can tap a more highly skilled medical transcriptionist to help meet the challenges of the evolving EHR/HIT environment.

In promoting the effectiveness of their technology, some technology providers suggest that the need for medical transcriptionists is gone or commoditize the value of medical transcriptionists by underestimating their role and contribution. Many FESR and EMR technologies promote the elimination of medical transcriptionists in favor of clinician-based documentation while BESR technologies promote medical transcriptionist cost reductions. Though there is a truthful element to these claims, there is additional information that consumers are often not always clear about until these technologies are put into practice that sometimes create a bit of disillusionment.

Though no one can fully predict the future, when considering documentation options a strong case can be made for retaining existing assets while trialing or transitioning to alternative methods. Rather than taking aim at legacy methods, especially in light of a growing health documentation concern and migration to a national healthcare information infrastructure, technology providers, consultants, advisors and consumers would be well-advised to consider expanding the role of their medical transcriptionists for an improved adoption experience, to aid in evolving documentation processes and to ensure continuation of documentation quality and integrity.

The future of the medical transcriptionist

MTs are poised to evolve into clinical data, data quality, and decision support specialists (as noted in a Practice Brief published by AHIMA entitled Speech Recognition in the Electronic Health Record. As constituencies across the healthcare sector consider these roles, consider one of the reasons clinical EMR adoption has been limited (difficult to use or technophobia), which could be aided by the work of an medical transcriptionist turned Medical Documentation Specialist (MDS), Medical Language Specialist (MLS) or Medical Transcription Editor (MTE), and consider other current deficiencies or emerging needs related to healthcare documentation, the medical transcriptionist has a number of avenues for offering professional services that the healthcare industry clearly needs.

For more information on the leading medical transcription training program contact Career Step at 1-800-246-7837.