



**Medical Transcription Services:
Do You Know What You're Paying For?**

White Paper

Prepared by eMedDox

www.emeddox.com

October 2008

“You get what you pay for.”

It's a time-tested truism that serves consumers well--whether they're shopping for a new car, an insurance agency . . . or a medical transcription service.

The challenge for physicians and clinic managers seeking medical transcription services, however, traditionally hasn't been simply *getting* what they're paying for, it's been *knowing* what they're paying for. Many medical office administrators are in the dark about what services--or equipment, or technology—are included in the bills they receive each month. Much of the confusion surrounds the issue of pricing for the transcription itself.

No Boundaries

Pricing methods for medical transcription have traditionally fallen all across the board. Some companies charge according to the number of minutes dictated, others charge by the line, and still others by the page.

Problem is, each method can be subject to wide fluctuation--and, unfortunately, sometimes even manipulation. For example, how many words can be spoken in a minute? It really depends on whether the person dictating is a fast talker or slow speaker. How many lines are on a page? It depends on the size of the margins and the spacing of those lines. And how many characters are in a line? Again, it depends . . .

Setting Standards

To address the need to resolve discrepancies in measuring the content of medical transcription, the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) and the Medical Transcription Industry Association (MTIA) teamed up. Their goal was to develop industry standards that, among other things, would help keep everyone on the same page, so to speak. They focused on figuring out which method of measuring transcription content was most often used and most effective, and the visible black character (VBC), they concluded, was the answer.

“Ultimately, the task force identified VBC as the only counting method that could be easily understood, verified, and replicated by all parties in the medical transcription business processes,” AHIMA/MTIA said in its 2007 report (<http://www.mtia.com/downloads/StandardUnitOfMeasure.pdf>) recommending the VBC be accepted as the industry standard unit of measure.

A VBC is a character that can be seen with the naked eye. Under this counting scheme, spaces, carriage returns, and hidden formatting instructions such as bolding, underline, text boxes, printer configurations, and spell checking are not counted in the total character count.

--AHIMA/MTIA, “A Standard Unit of Measure for Transcribed Reports”

So, looking for a medical transcription company that charges by the line--measured by VBCs--is a good first step toward taking control of and reducing transcription costs. Other essential factors to consider include **technology, templates**, and, ultimately, **quality**.

Time-Saving Technology

The word “technology” conjures up, for many, the sound of a ringing cash register. But “technology” doesn’t necessarily mean “expensive” in the language of medical transcription. In fact, technology can be a real money saver because it ultimately empowers medical transcription services to boost a healthcare provider’s efficiency and productivity.

Features such as e-signature, speech recognition software, and document archiving save time, speed turnaround, ensure accuracy, and make sure the people who need access to the transcribed documents have it when they need it. Finding out exactly what technology is available—including what’s included, what’s optional, and how much each option costs--is key to making an informed decision.

Taking Down the Line Count with Templates

Another way to save money on medical transcription is to reduce line counts. Templates do just that. By using extensive custom templates, office administrators can save on lines that repeat throughout the transcriptions, such as patient or clinician information, referral letters, envelopes, or summaries.

For example, if an office is producing 10,000 lines of medical transcription a month, incorporating information that needs to be included on each document into a template can reduce the line count to as low as 8,000 lines. That’s 2,000 lines of text that won’t be included on the bill! With that kind of savings, it’s easy to see why it’s vital to ask medical transcription providers about their ability to build customized templates.

Quality: “Cheaper” Seldom Means “Better”

Of course, the bottom line in the search for a good deal on anything should never be based on price alone. Quality must demand equal billing because bargain-basement prices often signal bargain-basement results. Many times, medical transcription companies lower their rates to get more business. But to give those lower rates, they must cut the quality of their services as well. That’s simply not acceptable for healthcare providers committed to keeping thorough and accurate medical records.

To evaluate the quality of a medical transcription service, it’s important to consider the following issues:

- **Accuracy** – How many errors turn up in transcribed documents? For example, offshore medical transcription companies may offer low rates and quick turnaround, but language issues often generate numerous errors and omissions.

- **Confidentiality** – What measures are in place to ensure patient confidentiality? Confidentiality will be top priority for a high-quality medical transcription service, whereas companies not as concerned about information security might be more willing to cut corners to reduce costs.
- **Billing Practices** – Does the medical transcription service provide a detailed report with the bill so clients can verify the charges and track workflow? A willingness to be open and up-front about all charges and services is a hallmark of a company that operates with integrity.

Conclusion

Understanding the pricing methods and charges involved in medical transcription doesn't have to be a guessing game. AHIMA/MTIA's recent recommendation of sorely needed line measurement standards have gone a long way toward helping healthcare clinic administrators and physicians make better informed decisions about their medical transcription. Beyond that, the willingness of office managers and clinicians to ask questions, pursue answers, and expect high-quality results can ensure they know—and are getting—what they're paying for from their medical transcription service organization.

