

Making Everything Easier!™

Medical Transcription

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Navigate medical transcription training
- Explore opportunities in this exciting field
- Use your healthcare experience to make extra money as a medical transcriptionist

Anne Martinez
Medical Transcriptionist



Get More and Do More at Dummies.com®



Start with **FREE** Cheat Sheets

Cheat Sheets include

- Checklists
- Charts
- Common Instructions
- And Other Good Stuff!

To access the Cheat Sheet created specifically for this book, go to
www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/medicaltranscription

Get Smart at Dummies.com

Dummies.com makes your life easier with 1,000s of answers on everything from removing wallpaper to using the latest version of Windows.

Check out our

- Videos
- Illustrated Articles
- Step-by-Step Instructions

Plus, each month you can win valuable prizes by entering our Dummies.com sweepstakes. *

Want a weekly dose of Dummies? Sign up for Newsletters on

- Digital Photography
- Microsoft Windows & Office
- Personal Finance & Investing
- Health & Wellness
- Computing, iPods & Cell Phones
- eBay
- Internet
- Food, Home & Garden

Find out “HOW” at Dummies.com

*Sweepstakes not currently available in all countries; visit Dummies.com for official rules.



Medical Transcription FOR **DUMMIES®**

by Anne Martinez



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Medical Transcription For Dummies®

Published by
John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, the Wiley logo, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, A Reference for the Rest of Us!, The Dummies Way, Dummies Daily, The Fun and Easy Way, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

For technical support, please visit www.wiley.com/techsupport.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012952197

ISBN 978-1-118-34307-4 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-118-45052-9 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-46105-1 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-46107-5 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



WILEY

About the Author

Anne Martinez and medical transcription met for the first time in 2005. She had no idea what she was getting in to. Desiring a little “regular work” to round out her self-employment income, she took to the Internet and began researching work-at-home jobs. Medical transcription seemed a perfect match for her love of language and interest in all things medical. Her first step was to look for an introductory how-to book, but there wasn’t one. She determined on the spot that she would write it; first, though, on to becoming a medical transcriptionist!

In 2006, after about a year of intense studying at home, Anne graduated from the M-TEC online medical transcription program. Soon thereafter, she was employed full time (despite her original intention to work part time) and garnering the benefits of health insurance she didn’t have to pay for entirely herself, a steady income, and actual paid vacation days! She later switched to a part-time independent contractor position to gain a more flexible schedule and take advantage of additional opportunities.

During her time as an MT, Anne transcribed many, many medical reports for hospitals and physician groups, including history and physical exams, discharge summaries, operative reports, consultations, office notes, and an amazing variety of diagnostic procedures.

She’s currently wrapped up in writing projects and managing her successful website, GoCertify (www.gocertify.com), so she’s put her MT career on hold. However, it stands ready in the wings, waiting for her return should the need arise.

Dedication

To all the hockey players I've ever played with or against, especially the teams I've been honored to be part of: May your skates always be sharp, the ice hard, and the Zamboni working.

P.S. May your medical records contain only routine office notes.

Author's Acknowledgments

A book is rarely the fruit of a single author, and this one is no different. Many people participated in shaping it and packing it with the most relevant and accessible information possible. My first shout-out goes to Patty Urban, my go-to resource for everything MT since practically day one of my MT career and the natural pick to serve as technical editor of *Medical Transcription For Dummies*.

To Ann Morgan and the other MTs who hang out at the Medical Transcription Networking Corner on Facebook, thank you for sharing your experiences and opinions on all things MT. Carol Butler, Cindy Leach, and Debi Shope made time to contribute thoughtful MT wisdom and advice despite intensely busy schedules.

Others who were instrumental to the creation of this book include Lindsay Lefevere, who gave me the chance to write the book I've been thinking about since I signed up for my first MT course, and Matt Wagner, without whom I never would have met Lindsay. Elizabeth Kuball, project editor extraordinaire, dedicated her time and expertise to make sure this book became the best it could be. Many thanks also to Steve Elliot, who once again pointed me in the right direction when I told him there was a book I wanted to write. Extra kudos to Sara Devine, for relentlessly tracking down permissions and helping keep the rest of my work life running while I focused on this book.

Special thanks to Dan McGovern for his support, encouragement, and friendship that helped carry this book and its author through an onslaught of deadlines, and to my teenage children, Evan and Rebecca, who basically surrendered me to this process and largely took care of themselves for the duration.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments at <http://dummies.custhelp.com>. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

Acquisitions and Editorial

Project Editor: Elizabeth Kuball

Executive Editor: Lindsay Sandman Lefevere

Copy Editor: Elizabeth Kuball

Assistant Editor: David Lutton

Editorial Program Coordinator: Joe Niesen

Technical Editor: Patricia Urban

Senior Editorial Manager: Jennifer Ehrlich

Editorial Manager: Elizabeth Kuball

Editorial Assistant: Rachelle Amick,
Alexa Koschier

Cover Photos: © Feng Yu / iStockphoto.com

Cartoons: Rich Tennant (www.the5thwave.com)

Composition Services

Project Coordinator: Patrick Redmond

Layout and Graphics: Melanie Habig,
Jennifer Henry, Andrea Hornberger

Proofreaders: Joni Heredia, Jessica Kramer

Indexer: Steve Rath

Publishing and Editorial for Consumer Dummies

Kathleen Nebenhaus, Vice President and Executive Publisher

Kristin Ferguson-Wagstaffe, Product Development Director

Ensley Eikenburg, Associate Publisher, Travel

Kelly Regan, Editorial Director, Travel

Publishing for Technology Dummies

Andy Cummings, Vice President and Publisher

Composition Services

Debbie Stailey, Director of Composition Services

Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Part I: So, You Want to Be a Medical Transcriptionist.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1: Just the Facts	9
Chapter 2: The What, How, Who, and Why of Medical Transcription.....	17
Chapter 3: Getting a Handle on Job Prospects and Employment Options	35
Chapter 4: Becoming a Working Medical Transcriptionist	49
<i>Part II: Getting the Job Done: Medical Transcription How-To</i>	<i>65</i>
Chapter 5: Medical Language Boot Camp.....	67
Chapter 6: Formatting: The Basics	85
Chapter 7: Cracking the Code: Deciphering Difficult Dictation	101
Chapter 8: Mastering the Key Medical Transcription References	109
Chapter 9: Meeting the Need for Speed	123
<i>Part III: Looking at the Types of Reports You'll Transcribe</i>	<i>131</i>
Chapter 10: History and Physical Examination	133
Chapter 11: Consultation	143
Chapter 12: Operative Reports	151
Chapter 13: Discharge and Death Summaries	161
Chapter 14: Beyond the Big Four: Other Common Reports	169
<i>Part IV: Employment Matters: Landing and Managing a Medical Transcriptionist Job.....</i>	<i>189</i>
Chapter 15: Medical Transcriptionist Job Hunting	191
Chapter 16: Managing On-the-Job Issues	205
Chapter 17: Climbing the Career Ladder	215
Chapter 18: Working from Home	223
Chapter 19: Financial Considerations for Independent Contractors	239
Chapter 20: Staying Healthy for the Long Haul.....	255

<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	265
Chapter 21: Ten Keys to Career Success	267
Chapter 22: Ten Myths about Medical Transcription.....	275
Chapter 23: Ten Great Online Resources.....	281
<i>Part VI: Appendixes</i>	285
Appendix A: Glossary.....	287
Appendix B: Commonly Dictated Phrases and How to Transcribe Them.....	299
Appendix C: Sample Reports.....	309
<i>Index</i>	325

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book.....	2
What You're Not to Read.....	2
Foolish Assumptions.....	2
How This Book Is Organized	3
Part I: So, You Want to Be a Medical Transcriptionist.....	3
Part II: Getting the Job Done: Medical Transcriptionist How-To	3
Part III: Looking At the Types of Reports You'll Transcribe	4
Part IV: Employment Matters: Landing and Managing a Medical Transcriptionist Job.....	4
Part V: The Part of Tens.....	4
Part VI: Appendixes	4
Icons Used in This Book	5
Where to Go from Here.....	5

Part I: So, You Want to Be a Medical Transcriptionist 7

Chapter 1: Just the Facts.9

Getting the Skinny on the Medical Transcription Field.....	10
Where the jobs are	11
How much they pay.....	11
What it takes to break in.....	12
Looking at What Goes into Good Transcription.....	12
Anticipating What You'll Transcribe.....	13
Making a Career of Medical Transcription.....	14

Chapter 2: The What, How, Who, and Why of Medical Transcription.17

What Medical Transcriptionists Do	17
Officially: It's about documentation	18
Unofficially: Critical contributions to patient care.....	20
How Medical Transcription Works	21
Who Makes for Good Medical Transcriptionists: The Traits You Need.....	24
Knowledge of medical terminology and procedures	24
English grammar and punctuation skills	24
Top-notch reference skills.....	25
Keen listening skills	25
Ability to work under pressure.....	25



Ability to work with little or no supervision	26
A perfectionistic streak.....	26
Laserlike focus	27
Assessing yourself: Do you have what it takes?	27
Why Medical Transcription Can Be a Great Career	32
You can train at home.....	32
You can do it from almost anywhere	33
It's fascinating and intellectually challenging	33
You make a difference in patient care.....	33
Your work schedule is often flexible	34
Nobody cares how old you are, what you look like, or how you dress.....	34

Chapter 3: Getting a Handle on Job Prospects and Employment Options 35

Where You Can Work.....	35
For a physician or physician group.....	36
For hospitals.....	36
For a medical-transcription service	37
Your Job Prospects	39
Watching the occupational forecasts.....	39
Knowing the facts on speech recognition technology.....	39
Going E: The move to electronic medical records	40
Grasping the impact of global outsourcing.....	42
Financial Facts	42
How much you can expect to earn	42
How you're paid: By the line or by the hour?	44
Employee or independent contractor.....	47
Health insurance and other benefits	47

Chapter 4: Becoming a Working Medical Transcriptionist 49

Getting off the Launch Pad: What You'll Need to Break In.....	49
Educational credentials	51
Professional certification	51
Getting Educated	55
Scoping out the medical transcriptionist curriculum.....	55
Seeing where you can study.....	57
Comparing your options.....	60
Paying for your education	61

Part II: Getting the Job Done: Medical Transcription How-To 65

Chapter 5: Medical Language Boot Camp 67

The Anatomy of a Medical Word	68
Word roots: Brushing up on your Latin and Greek	69
Prefixes: Looking at what comes first	72

Word endings: There's a suffix for that.....	76
Getting to the meaning.....	78
Commonly Confused Medical Words.....	79
Drugs and Dosages.....	82
Generic versus brand name.....	82
Dosages: How much how often	82
Chapter 6: Formatting: The Basics	85
Report Headings and Subheadings	86
Capitalization	88
Drugs, diseases, and organisms.....	89
Titles of people, places, and trademarked things	90
Punctuation	91
Separators: Commas, semicolons, and colons.....	92
Connectors: Hyphens and apostrophes	94
Numbers	96
Arabic, ordinal, and Roman.....	96
Guidelines for transcribing numbers	97
Fractions	98
Pluralizing numbers.....	98
Ranges and ratios	99
Abbreviations and Acronyms	99
When to spell them out.....	99
When to leave them be.....	100
How to avoid dangerous abbreviations	100
Chapter 7: Cracking the Code: Deciphering Difficult Dictation. . .	101
Aiming for Efficiency	101
Filling in the Blanks, Step by Step	103
Step 1: Play with the controls.....	104
Step 2: Leave it blank (for now)	104
Step 3: Consider the context	104
Step 4: Refer to previous reports.....	105
Step 5: When in doubt, leave it out.....	105
Understanding Heavy Accents.....	106
Relax and then dive in	106
Common tendencies of ESL dictators	107
Chapter 8: Mastering the Key Medical Transcription	
References.....	109
Considering the Source.....	110
Tracking Down Medical Words and Phrases	111
Beyond definitions: Mining a medical dictionary	112
Medical word books	115
Abbreviation and acronym finders.....	116
Nailing Down Drugs and Dosages.....	118
Top drug references for medical transcriptionists	118
Clearing up cloudy medication details	119
Checking Up on Laboratory Tests.....	120

Consulting the Book (of Style)	121
Calling on Colleagues for Help	121

Chapter 9: Meeting the Need for Speed123

Mastering the Number-One Speed Tool: Word Expanders	124
Choosing a word expander	125
Becoming an expander ninja	126
Taking Advantage of Macros	127
Your Computer on Steroids: Using Dual Monitors	128

Part III: Looking at the Types of Reports You'll Transcribe 131

Chapter 10: History and Physical Examination.133

Overview	134
Chief Complaint	135
History of Present Illness	135
Review of Past History	136
Past Medical History	136
Past Surgical History	136
Family History	137
Social History	137
Allergies	137
Current Medications	138
Review of Systems	138
Physical Examination	139
Diagnostic Studies	140
Assessment and Plan	141

Chapter 11: Consultation143

Overview	144
Consulting and Primary Physicians	144
Reason for Consultation	145
Details of Present Illness	145
Review of Past History	146
Current Symptoms	147
Laboratory and Diagnostic Findings	147
Physical Examination	148
Impression and Recommendations	148

Chapter 12: Operative Reports.151

Overview	151
Physicians and Assistants	152
Preoperative and Postoperative Diagnoses	153
Procedure Performed	154
Anesthesia	154

Indications for Procedure.....	155
Findings.....	155
Description of Procedure	156
Disposition	157
Additional Headings	157
Complications	158
Tourniquet time	158
Estimated blood loss	158
Drains	158
Hardware and implants.....	159
Specimens.....	159
Sewing Up the Case	159
Chapter 13: Discharge and Death Summaries	161
Discharge Summary	161
Overview	161
Admitting and Discharge Diagnoses.....	163
History.....	163
Hospital Course.....	164
Laboratory Data	164
Procedures Performed	165
Physical Examination on Discharge	166
Discharge Medications.....	166
Plan/Disposition.....	167
Discharge Instructions	167
Additional headings.....	167
Death Summary.....	168
Chapter 14: Beyond the Big Four: Other Common Reports	169
Procedure Notes	169
Indications for Procedure.....	170
Medications	170
Procedure in Detail.....	170
Findings and Recommendations.....	171
Chart and Progress Notes	171
Radiology and Imaging Reports	174
Study details	174
Reason for Study	175
Technique	175
Findings.....	176
Impression	176
Summary of Labor and Delivery	176
Psychiatric Assessment.....	177
Presenting Problem	178
Past Psychiatric History.....	179
Substance Abuse.....	179
Past Medical History	180
Family History	180

Social History	180
Current Medications.....	181
Mental Status Examination	181
Diagnoses	182
Treatment Plan.....	183
Independent Medical Evaluation	183
Introduction.....	184
History and Present Complaints	185
Physical Findings	185
Diagnostic Studies	185
Records Review.....	186
Diagnosis.....	186
Conclusion	186
Physician Certification	188

Part IV: Employment Matters: Landing and Managing a Medical Transcriptionist Job 189

Chapter 15: Medical Transcriptionist Job Hunting191

Getting Organized: Prelaunch Planning	192
Identifying your perfect job.....	192
Keeping a log	194
Creating a cheat sheet.....	194
Knowing Where to Find Job Opportunities	195
Your training school's job resources	195
Medical transcription websites.....	196
All-purpose job boards.....	197
Crafting Your Résumé.....	197
Facing and Acing Employment Tests	198
Conquering the mind game	199
Knocking off the knowledge assessment	200
Meeting the transcription challenge	200
Tools to use	200
Evaluating and Comparing Job Offers.....	201
Questions to ask before accepting a job offer	201
Delaying acceptance, tactfully	202
Being mindful of your long-term goals	203

Chapter 16: Managing On-the-Job Issues205

Your First Job: Knowing What to Expect.....	205
Navigating the Quality Assessment Process.....	206
Understanding the challenges.....	208
Challenging a quality assessment penalty.....	209
HIPAA and Patient Privacy: What You Need to Know	210
Understanding HIPAA regulations	211
Safeguarding patient privacy.....	213

Chapter 17: Climbing the Career Ladder	215
Mapping Out Common Career Paths	215
Keeping Current through Continuing Education	216
Where to find courses and seminars	217
How to fund your ongoing learning	217
Joining Up: Professional Organizations for Medical Transcriptionists	218
Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity	220
American Health Information Management Association	221
Getting Certified	221
Switching Employers the Right Way	222
Chapter 18: Working from Home	223
Staying Connected: Internet Service	224
Choosing a Computer Setup	224
Laptop or desktop?	225
Specs: Operating system, hard drive, and RAM	226
Monitors: How to choose?	229
Keyboard	230
Mouse or trackball	231
Scoping Out Transcription Gear	231
Headphones	231
Foot pedals	233
Tackling the Technical Details	235
Protecting your assets	235
Backing up	236
Finding tech support	236
Keeping Work in Its Place (And Interruptions Out)	238
Chapter 19: Financial Considerations for Independent Contractors	239
Keeping Good Records	241
Tracking your income and expenses	243
Keeping the paper trail	244
Paying Uncle Sam	246
Understanding self-employment tax	247
Making estimated tax payments	248
Introducing 1099s	249
Adding a Schedule C to your tax return	249
Deducting everything you can	251
Getting Insured	251
Health insurance	252
Errors-and-omissions insurance	253
Homeowner's and renter's insurance riders	253

Chapter 20: Staying Healthy for the Long Haul 255

Go Ergonomic or Go Home: Preventing Aches and Pains	256
Your workstation: Assume the position	256
Your work environment	260
Keeping Carpal Tunnel Syndrome at Bay	260
Dodging Computer Vision Syndrome	261
Avoiding Stuffed Pretzel Syndrome	262
Beating Burnout	262

Part V: The Part of Tens 265**Chapter 21: Ten Keys to Career Success 267**

Use the Right Tools	267
Craft a Regular Work Routine and Stick to It	268
Become a Master of Faster	268
Mind Your Body	269
Project Professionalism	269
Get a Mentor	270
Tune In to the MT Network	270
Keep Your Balance	271
Don't Get Sucked into a Negativity Vortex	272
Be Adaptable, Embrace Change, Nourish Your Career	272

Chapter 22: Ten Myths about Medical Transcription 275

You'll Make \$50,000 a Year Working from Home	275
You Can Work and Take Care of the Kids at the Same Time	276
If You Can Type Really Fast, You're in Like Flynn	276
You, Too, Can Become an MT with Little or No Training	277
Speech Recognition Technology Will Make Medical Transcriptionists Obsolete	277
Electronic Health Records Will Eliminate the Need for Medical Transcriptionists	278
Most Medical Transcription Work is Being Outsourced Overseas	278
Getting Certified Is the Best Way to Break Into Medical Transcription ...	278
It's Low-Stress Work	279
Real Men Don't Become Medical Transcriptionists	280

Chapter 23: Ten Great Online Resources 281

Meet at the Corner on Facebook	281
Check Multiple Sources with OneLook	281
Find What's-Her-Name from Somewhere	282
Solve Drug Problems	282
Simplify Your Work Life	282
Talk Productively about Productivity	283
Get Industrial-Strength Updates	283

Go Shopping for Transcription Gear.....	283
Healthy Computing in Exquisite Detail.....	284
Tax Advice Straight from the IRS.....	284
Part VI: Appendixes.....	285
Appendix A: Glossary	287
Appendix B: Commonly Dictated Phrases and How to Transcribe Them.....	299
Transcribing Lab Data	299
Grams Percent and Other Units of Measure	301
Transcribing Medications	303
Commonly Dictated Physical Exam Phrases.....	303
Commonly Dictated Obstetrics Phrases	305
A para what? Transcribing obstetric history.....	305
Labor-in-progress reports.....	306
Everyday Cardiology Phrases	307
Heart sounds and murmurs.....	307
Transcribing EKG findings.....	307
Appendix C: Sample Reports	309
History and Physical Examination	309
Consultation Report	311
Consultation Letter	312
Discharge Summary	313
Death Summary.....	315
Operative Report	315
Procedure Note.....	316
Progress Note.....	317
SOAP Note	318
Radiology Report	319
Summary of Labor and Delivery	319
Psychiatric Assessment.....	320
Independent Medical Evaluation	322
Index.....	325

Introduction

You've probably heard that medical transcription is a flexible career that you can do from home. Perhaps you're attracted to the idea of being part of the drama and intimate details of medical care, and medical transcription sounds like it would be very interesting work. Maybe you just want something, anything, you can do from home to earn a buck, and you're wondering if medical transcription could be it.

Despite what some advertisements might lead you to believe, it's not true that anyone willing to take a course can become a medical transcriptionist (MT) and earn big bucks working from home. It *is* true that it's interesting, challenging, and often flexible work. Many MTs do work from home. You can prepare for and launch an MT career without ever stepping out your front door, if you want to. For some people, it's a great career option, but it's not the right choice for everyone.

About This Book

This isn't a textbook about how to become an MT. You don't need to read it cover to cover or even in order. Dip into the part you need, when you need it. Come back later and dip into a different section when you need that. Consider this a quick study guide, reusable reference, and career companion.

There's a lot of information, and even more misinformation, available about working as a medical transcriptionist. This book is here to help you sort fact from fiction, so you can decide if you want to become an MT, and if so, how to go about it. It's also designed to stand beside you and answer the questions that most commonly pop up after you get on the job.

Conventions Used in This Book

I don't use many conventions in this book, but I do use a few:

- ✓ When I define a new term, I *italicize* it. You can find the definition nearby (often in parentheses).
- ✓ I use `monofont` for web and e-mail addresses. **Note:** When this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that we haven't added extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

The shaded boxes that appear here and there are sidebars. They include extra information that's interesting or fun. The material in them isn't essential to understanding the topic at hand, and you can bypass them without missing out on key concepts.

The Technical Stuff icon identifies extras included for people who like to know the details behind things. If you're not one of them, it's okay to zip right past.

Foolish Assumptions

I figure you've probably picked up this book for one of the following reasons:

- ✓ You're thinking about becoming an MT and you want to know what the job entails and how to get started.
- ✓ You're already an MT student and you picked up this book to help you get off to a flying start.
- ✓ You're a working MT who's as obsessed with learning and growing as you've always been.

I also assume that you want to get straight to business and not waste time lollygagging around.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is broken into parts that parallel the journey to an MT career. It starts at the beginning with career exploration and moves on to identifying and mastering practical skills and then to landing and managing an MT job. The final part provides reference materials you can use to help you on the job.

Every chapter in *Medical Transcription For Dummies* is designed to be entirely self-contained. You can go through them in order or jump straight to whatever you need at the moment. This is one time when you can have something both ways.

Part I: So, You Want to Be a Medical Transcriptionist

Before diving into a career in medical transcription, you'll want to know exactly what's involved and what to expect. This part will give you the basis to decide if medical transcription is a realistic career option for you, and if so, how to get off to a running start. It starts with an inside look at what MTs do on a daily basis and what it really takes to break into the field. You'll also survey the types of places MTs work and how much you can expect to earn. One of the most crucial foundations to a successful MT launch is getting the right training. This part identifies what that should include so you don't spend good money on bad training.

Part II: Getting the Job Done: Medical Transcriptionist How-To

This is where you'll meet and build the technical skills that lie at the heart of a successful medical transcription career. You can put yourself through medical terminology boot camp and study up on the mechanics of formatting medical reports following accepted standards. There's also a chapter packed with tips for deciphering difficult dictation and tricks for coping with mumbly mouthed dictators. In medical transcription, time is (your) money. The chapters on effective referencing and speed-boosting techniques will help you lay in the skills so you can be fast and accurate.

Part III: Looking At the Types of Reports You'll Transcribe

This part takes you on an in-depth tour of individual reports and how to transcribe them. Each member of the “Big Four” family of reports gets its own detailed chapter. You also step through another half-dozen report types you’re likely to encounter.

Part IV: Employment Matters: Landing and Managing a Medical Transcriptionist Job

MT skills are useful only if you can put them to work! This part offers tips and advice to help you choose and land your first MT job — and the one after that. There’s a chapter explaining the technical details of outfitting a home office. If you opt to work as an independent contractor (IC), you’ll want to read the chapter on financial matters, for sure.

Part V: The Part of Tens

If you’re a fan of top ten lists, this is the part for you. It includes ten factors that contribute to MT success, busts ten common myths about medical transcription work, and introduces you to ten online resources that stand head and shoulders above the rest.

Part VI: Appendixes

Good references are among an MT’s best allies. The glossary, transcription examples, and sample reports in this part are here for you to turn to when you need a little help. They don’t eradicate the need for dedicated reference books, but they do provide a unique cross-section of material that zeroes in on the items experience shows you’re most likely to need.

Icons Used in This Book



As you go through this book, you'll see the following cute little icons in the margins. Here's what they mean:

The Tip icon points out a handy technique or shortcut that can save you time or help you avoid frustration down the road.



When you see the Remember icon, it's pointing out a key concept you'll want to file away in your brain for future use.



The Warning icon alerts you to potential pitfalls and things that can cause serious trouble. When you see it, pay extra-careful attention to the text nearby.



The Technical Stuff icon points out technical tidbits that are interesting but not absolutely necessary to understanding the topic at hand. If you want all the details you can get, read them. If you want just the basics, skip them.

Where to Go from Here

By all means, jump into this book anywhere you'd like. If you're in an exploratory phase, Chapter 1 is the obvious place to begin, but you may also head on over to the Part of Tens and start by clearing up ten myths about medical transcription. If you want to take a gander at some actual medical reports, Appendix C has you covered.

If you're burning to steep yourself in medical terminology as quickly as possible, the boot camp in Chapter 5 is specifically for you. If difficult dictators have you hog-tied, Chapter 7 will help you decipher what they are (in theory) saying. Working MTs and students near graduation may be particularly interested in the "faster, faster" productivity techniques in Chapter 9.

Thinking about going the independent contractor instead of employee route? Be sure to read Chapter 19 so you can get your financial ducks in a row and keep them there.

You also can read this book in the ordinary, straightforward manner: Start at the beginning and keep going until there are no pages left to turn.

Part I

So, You Want to Be a Medical Transcriptionist

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"The suspense is really killing me. Will he administer 4mL or 5mL of lidocaine?"

In this part . . .

Time to cut through the hype and clutter and get to the facts on a medical transcriptionist career. As a medical transcriptionist, you'll make critical contributions to patient care that go far beyond typing fast. This section gives you an inside look at what medical transcriptionists do on a daily basis and the personal traits and professional skills required to get the job done. It also surveys where the jobs are, how much they pay, and how to get the training needed to break into the field.

Chapter 1

Just the Facts

In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking below the surface to see what medical transcriptionists really do
 - ▶ Surveying employment options and paycheck possibilities
 - ▶ Identifying the skills medical transcriptionists need
 - ▶ Taking a peek at the reports you'll transcribe
 - ▶ Charting a career in medical transcription
-

If you're considering a career in medical transcription, there are some things you should know. The very first is that what medical transcriptionists (MTs) actually do all day is a whole lot more interesting and much more difficult than what most people think. Typing fast while listening to someone speak in tongues over headphones is just the tip of the iceberg.

Okay, the dictator isn't really speaking in tongues, but it often sounds like she is, and the iceberg part is completely true. In this chapter, you'll explore the 90 percent of medical transcription that most people never see because it's out of sight, just like the largest part of an iceberg.

If you've heard that a lot of MTs work from home, you are, indeed, well informed. For many MTs, the daily commute is no farther than the walk from their breakfast table to their home office. Some MTs commute to their place of work, just like other employees, although these seem to be dwindling in number.

Medical transcription work has many attributes that attract people looking for a fresh career start. You can train and work from practically anywhere you can get an Internet connection, including your home. Nobody cares what you look like or how old you are; the only thing that matters is whether you can do the job well. Schedules often can be juggled so that you can work around other commitments.

It's not all peaches and cream, however. Medical transcription can be high-stress work, and you aren't likely to get rich doing it. It takes a particular set of personality traits and technical skills to survive and thrive in an MT career. This chapter introduces the world of medical transcription, so that you can decide if you want to become a part of it.

Getting the Skinny on the Medical Transcription Field

A medical transcriptionist's job is to produce the clearest, most accurate healthcare documentation possible — and do it fast. Within the course of a day, a patient who comes into a hospital emergency room and is admitted with appendicitis will generate:

- ✓ An emergency room (ER) report
- ✓ Probably a CT scan or ultrasound of the abdomen
- ✓ A consultation with a gastroenterologist and/or a surgeon
- ✓ A complete preoperative history and physical examination
- ✓ An operative report detailing the appendectomy
- ✓ Potentially periodic progress notes
- ✓ A discharge summary when sent home the next day

And all of them require transcription. That's one patient, one hospital, one overnight stay. Multiply that by the number of patients who walk into hospitals each day, seven days a week.

Hospitals aren't the only prodigious producers of medical reports. Physician practices, specialty clinics, alternative health practitioners, managed care organizations, diagnostic facilities, and lots of other places all generate dictation every day.

These are the records that healthcare providers return to time and again when deciding what treatments a patient will receive immediately and in the future. They're also legal documents. They may be used to determine whether someone is eligible to receive disability benefits and how much. In some cases, they'll be pulled out when determining compensation for an injury or death that occurred as the result of someone else's actions.

MT work is interesting, intellectually challenging, and a whole lot harder than people who've never done it can imagine. Many people spend good money on MT training, only to find that they don't like doing medical transcription, and it doesn't like them much either. Other people absolutely love it. The people who love it tend to share certain personality traits. Top among them are

- ✓ A love of language and a passion for learning
- ✓ The desire and ability to work independently and sometimes under pressure
- ✓ A perfectionistic streak that makes attention to tiny details come naturally