Voice Recognition Software
An Incomplete Answer for Electronic Medical Records

There's no denying the need for greater efficiency in how we deal with medical records. Our country has a growing, aging population who proportionally receive more medical tests and procedures. In turn, this creates an avalanche of medical record documentation that needs to be easily shared between healthcare providers, insurance companies, regulators, and patients.

The issue consistently receives national attention, with calls from patient advocacy groups looking for industry reform to address rising costs and medical errors in our healthcare system. One of the most commonly discussed methods for achieving these advancements is the applied leverage of information technology. We are clearly heading in the direction of universal electronic medical records.

The healthcare industry has heard these battle cries, and has worked to address the problem. They have experimented over the years with the efficacy of voice recognition transcription as a potential solution, since Al Gore "invented the Internet." Many believed, once perfected, voice recognition technology would allow dictated notes to be automatically formatted into an electronic medical record, and thus eliminate the need for medical transcriptionists. This achievement would revolutionize the healthcare industry, providing consumers with more timely and accurate patient records, at a lower cost.

The Truth about Voice Recognition

Time has proven that voice recognition alone is insufficient to ensure accurate and timely electronic medical records. No physician is a perfect dictator. It is virtually impossible to use a verbatim transcription in a patient's file. The reality is that even with the best voice recognition software, editing for clarity and consistency is still required.

Some factors that influence the need for editing and review include:
- A physician's dictation is not always clear enough for software to capture spoken words, especially when the physician is tired or in a hurry.
- Foreign accents and speech patterns can be difficult for software to interpret.
- A physician reading his notes will not always use appropriate grammar, punctuation, or make the right word choices to express meaning. All of these factors can impact future interpretation of intent.
- Dictation often includes inaudible words and sounds that need to be resolved or flagged for review.
- Transpositions of test values or medication dosage inconsistencies are common, and left uncorrected, pose potential life threatening results.
- Dictated notes can sometimes contain contradictory details, which need to be resolved.

The result of these factors is time required to be spent editing by either the physician or a trained transcriptionist to ensure the integrity of medical records.

Transcriptionist – A Changing Role
Medical transcription will remain a vital role in creating clear and accurate medical records. Voice recognition software will be able to facilitate a part of the creation of electronic medical records, but it can not fully automate the process. Medical transcription specialists will continue to be the critical resource in maintaining patient record quality. What changes for medical transcriptionists is the focus of their work.

For now, the transcriptionist role will change slowly. Many physicians and healthcare organizations will be slow to adopt electronic medical records, because of a lack of standardization in an approved industry platform to adopt. Without standardization, physicians risk investing in a platform that might not interoperate with a future national health information network. This will keep many practices on the sidelines until a platform standard is identified.

As the industry moves forward and adopts electronic medical records in large numbers, the medical transcriptionist role doesn't go away – It evolves to cover new industry needs. Future transcriptionists will become documentation specialists who are deployed for back-end voice recognition editing, quality assurance, data mining and abstraction, and data tagging.

These new roles will require the medical transcription industry to adapt in order to be successful. It will become important for us to invest in educating our transcriptionists to keep pace with changing job requirements.

Perfect Transcription, as a provider of cost effective and accurate medical transcription services, is dedicated to maintaining the highest level of service, and to be progressive in offering services that meet changing industry needs.

References
1. Preziosi, Peter: A Vision for Transcription within the Evolving Health Information Technology Marketplace, JAAMT Online, May 2007.

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