

Medical Transcription Outsourcing

Healthcare providers in the US are looking at ways and means to lower the cost of medical transcriptions and improve upon the turn-around-time for processing the patient records. The other bother confronting them is the shortage of qualified medical transcribers in the United States. In an effort to find solutions to these issues, a study was conducted by a well known group on the benefits of Medical Transcription Outsourcing.

As a first step, the off-shore vendor's performances were examined, an overview of the costs and benefits were worked out in tandem with the ROI, and how outsourcing will have its impact on transcribers based in the United States.

BENEFITS REVIEWED

The study revealed that 61% of the respondents were satisfied with the turn-around-time offered by off-shore companies, 29% were satisfied with lower costs and 13% felt that the quality was fairly impressive. A doctor based in Massachusetts, who was interviewed, said that he was able to get the dictation in 24 hours and the costs were lower than what he was paying to a transcriber here.

Likewise a pediatrician based in Boston appeared satisfied on not only saving costs, but quality of the reports sent by the off-shore vendors was as good as any service provider based in the United States.

As part of the study, radiologists were asked on whether offshore medical transcribers were able to provide STAT reports. They maintained that most of the vendors were able to deliver the reports in two hours, besides offshore companies also offered multiple options of delivering the reports in 2/4/6/8 hours.

Many providers felt that the turn-around-time offered was a decisive factor in their choice of choosing a vendor, other issues were secondary. There were a few providers that did not want to switchover to offshore vendors and the issues related to cost benefits had no impact on them.

A group of family practice doctors said that initially they insisted on getting reports in 24 hours, and after the offshore vendors complied with that delivery, new proposals for changing the turn-around-time to 7 hours were sent, and for STAT reports the anticipated turn-around-time was 1 hour.

OFFSHORE VENDORS

There were two different opinions amongst providers, some were very satisfied and others who simply hated the offshore option. There were quality issues for some, and others felt that there is a learning curve with offshore services, including domestic services and over a period of time quality can improve.

In their own words, the views expressed were:

"The offshore service providers are efficient, but a learning curve slows things down, first it was the language barrier, but that improved over a period of time. The quality is no longer an issue, it is as good as our in-house staff provide"

"The overseas vendors provide a good quality, except for some minor errors which we also tend to face in-house, the only concern we have is about privacy issues since offshore vendors are not bound by the privacy laws of the United States"

<http://www.medicaltranscriptionservice.com>

"I do not feel very enthusiastic about hiring offshore companies. We have many skilled transcribers in the United States that are in need of assignments. The main bother about offshore companies is about confidentiality issues. The communication skills of offshore vendors is also bad, most emails sent by them are illegible. The proof reading of the reports has to be done all over again by our editors in US and whatever cost savings we gain is lost on account of this"

"We have security and location concerns, and an organization as conservative as ours offshore transcription is the last option. However my personal view is that basic issues about medical transcriptions are similar in the US as they are in India, but security violations in India will be difficult to curb"

The host of respondents felt that editing and quality reviews should be done by English speaking staff members, and round-the-clock customer service should be available across time zones, and the header in the report should be blank without any identifying information, the dictations of the body contents only be made available to the offshore companies, with header details added after reports are sent by them.

INFLUENCE OF SPEECH RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

The providers were queried on whether speech recognition software will influence their outsourcing assignments. Many responded by saying that speech recognition technology needs perfection, and once that was achieved transcription services will be irrelevant. But for the moment speech recognition products are not reliable, and none of them considered switching to voice recognition software.

There was a provider who said that she was using back-end and front-end speech recognition, and it has cut down the MTSO workload by 2-3% of the total volume, this was intended to improve turn-around-time and lower costs of transcriptions.

There were differing views on speech recognition, some insisting that speech recognition will not be of any assistance to doctors for a couple of years, till the technology is mastered. The medical terminology was very complex and voice recognition has to be consistently accurate to replace MTs.

The study concluded with an overall view that transcription services provides employment benefits to a large section of the society, however outsourcing medical transcriptions received mixed reviews, with some expressing appreciation and others having a negative view about it. The pricing plans were also discussed and amongst the 59 respondents queried, 81% felt that paying by the line was the most preferred choice.