
Is the role of medical transcriptionist now obsolete?

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Like many traditional roles looking directly into the face of technology, the Medical Transcriptionist (MT) could be one of those roles relegated to the past, according to an article in the latest issue of the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Surgery (ANZJS)*, the peer-review publication of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).

There are pros and cons for every technological substitute however, and although new technology in areas of voice recognition (VR) and natural language processing (NLP) are viable options for the replacement of MT services, the article suggests that some of the advantages of utilising *human* skills still outweigh the benefits of the machine.

Additionally, the MT is faced with the prospect of their business being undermined by cheaper services offered by offshore companies, that apparently require no training and manage local staff limitations.

The benefits of outsourcing such a service has limitations of its own that can have serious repercussions in terms of the quality of the end product, including punctuation and spelling errors as well as privacy and patient safety and the article warns that confidential documents may go to countries where privacy laws and patient confidentiality vary or may be non-existent.

The article features a case in the United States where a lethal dose of insulin was prescribed, on the basis of a discharge summary typed by an offshore MT. Another case in the United States detailed a threat made from another offshore MT to release confidential information over a pay dispute.

The Medical Transcription Industry is largely unregulated however MTs are governed to some extent by the *National Privacy Act 1988*, and are recommended to check with their employer about any doubts they may have relating to privacy and confidentiality.

VR technology will almost certainly replace MTs in the long term to better manage progress notes and discharge summaries, but the article states that VR has become somewhat of a burden to clinicians, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds where further edits and formatting are required.

The article reminds us to think about how our voice will be transcribed into text the next time we dictate, and to ensure that the MT is based in Australia or New Zealand and has had professional training.

[Read the full article here](#)

The ANZ Journal of Surgery, published by Wiley-Blackwell, is the pre-eminent surgical journal published in Australia, New Zealand and the South-East Asian region for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. The Journal is dedicated to the promotion of outstanding surgical practice, and research of contemporary and international interest.

Media inquiries: Gabrielle Forman, Communications and Policy Officer
t: +61 3 9276 7430 | m: +61 498 218 008

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www.surgeons.org

Media inquiries: Gabrielle Forman, Communications and Policy Officer
t: +61 3 9276 7430 | m: +61 498 218 008