

# A Career Tailor-made for the Military Spouse?

## *One Military Spouse's Personal Story*

Debbie Kean

Years ago, I was working full time at a job I no longer enjoyed and trying to finish my Bachelor's degree while raising my daughter alone. In my misery, I began dreaming of working from home. I did not want a daycare center raising my child anymore. I did not want to be too tired to enjoy my daughter at night anymore. I did not want to work for ungrateful and inflexible bosses anymore. I started doing some online research, and one of the career paths I found, among all the scams and empty promises, was medical transcription. Blinded by my desires and dreams, I sent away for a \$300 software program that promised I could be a medical transcriptionist and work from home. When the program arrived, the literature clearly informed me that now I needed to solicit a clientele base on my own. WHAT? That was not part of the sales advertisement. Was I too naive to realize that ahead of time? Looking back, I do not think so. I bought into the advertisement, and that is what they were selling—an empty promise, a false hope, and a program that was useless to me at the time. I quickly realized that I had been taken, and I was discouraged but not ready to give up on my dream. I now realized I needed an education, so I went in search of one. The next scam I fell victim to was one of those goofy mail-order schools. You know the ones—they advertise on TV late at night and put postage-paid postcards in numerous magazines. It was while I was “studying” at night (still working full time during the day) that I met the man, a Marine, who would eventually become my husband.

Fast-forwarding a bit, I married this man . . . and the military! I quit my job and moved to his duty station. If you are now or once were a military

spouse, you know what happened next—new city and surroundings, starting over, making new friends, and *finding a new job!* When I relocated, I left my old life behind, including the goofy mail-order “education” program I had started. It was obvious it was not going to get me very far anyway. Instead, I immersed myself in learning all that I could about being a military spouse, learning how to support my new husband in his career as an active-duty member of the military, and in helping my daughter adjust to her new world. I eventually went out and got a job working on the base, and I was happy. Life was much better. Then we got orders! Here we go again!! Sound familiar?

We traveled cross-country, got settled at our new base, and I started to look for a new job. The pay at this base was worse than at the last base, but after 6 months, I finally landed a job, and things were once again falling into place. Right about the time I was thinking that we were pretty well adjusted to our new duty station, I started getting calls from my daughter's school about behavioral problems (obviously, she did not adjust to moving twice within a year as well as I thought she had). Quite often I had to leave work to deal with the school and the situations. As this pattern continued, I decided to take my daughter to see the doctor (must have that PCM referral first!) and then to see a counselor. This process required additional time off. Ironically, I was working as an executive

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assistant at a medical facility. The administration did not understand my need to seek clinical assistance for my daughter. Even though I always managed to get my work done on time, I was let go.

Although I was very upset about my termination, there was a positive aspect; I returned to the notion of working from home. I started fervently researching the concept of working from home. I considered many different “opportunities,” but before long, I found that medical transcription was one of the few legitimate home-based career paths and decided to pursue it. Having made my decision, I knew that without question, the next step was to get a good education. It should all be a breeze now, right?

Wrong! Finding a quality, legitimate, and reputable medical transcription school was not easy. There was information about dozens of schools to wade through. The cost ranged from several hundred to several thousand dollars. Luckily, it is much easier to research schools now because the American Association for Medical Transcription (AAMT) has an education approval program in place. Potential students can visit the AAMT Web site and see which schools have been approved by AAMT. The approval program was not in place when I was selecting a school, but I managed to choose a school that received approval as soon as the approval committee was assembled, and the program became a reality.

Learning to become a medical transcriptionist (MT) has not been an easy task. In the course of my education, my husband has been to combat and on numerous deployments, and we were sent overseas. In addition, learning to become an MT is not just a matter of learning medical terminology, anatomy, and report formats. It also entails learning about technology, the healthcare industry as a whole, the transcription field itself and where it fits into the healthcare team, as well as what the future holds, such as voice recognition and the electronic health record, and legal issues such as HIPAA. This profession is not about simply listening to a dictator and typing what he or she says into a nifty little medical report. It requires extraordinary critical thinking, problem solving, the ability to use interpretive medical language skills, and being prepared as the profession evolves toward the implementation of electronic health records.

All of this may sound a little intimidating, but the same preparation and education goes into any career. Aside from the ability to work from home, one of the greatest characteristics of becoming an MT, for me, is how it fits almost perfectly into the military lifestyle. If you are like me, you want to spend time with your service member and family when you can because you never know when the next deployment will be or how long you will be apart. As an MT, it is easier to be available to share that time together than it is with any other profession I can think of. Have you ever tried to get time off to go see your child’s school play or take your husband to the staging area to see him off before a deployment, or go see him pin on a new rank? Does your current job give you a 12-hour window to complete your day’s work? Medical transcription offers a flexibility that a working military spouse needs, craves, and requires.

*This has become a driving force in my pursuit of becoming a well-educated and skilled MT.*

Do you get sick of job-hunting every time you move to a new duty station? Do potential employers seem somewhat reluctant to hire you because you move every few years? As an MT, moving to a new duty station does not affect your job or employability—you take your job with you!

More than half of the military spouses I know are working on a college degree, usually from home (distance learning). Most of these spouses have been working on their degrees for many years—definitely more than 4 years. I do understand what they are working toward, as I am only 30 credits shy of my own degree, but I wonder if their schools have addressed their unique circumstances as military spouses. Even with a degree in hand, these spouses are still novices in their chosen fields. It is very expensive for any employer to hire a new graduate because they must invest in that person’s training. When an employer invests in a new hire, there is a reasonable expectation that the new employee will be with the company for some time, making military spouses high-risk employment candidates because they often move

every 3 or 4 years. With medical transcription, there is no more risk in hiring a military spouse than there is in hiring a civilian MT.

When I initially started pursuing this career, I did not realize how perfectly it would fit into my lifestyle. I chose this field for selfish and personal reasons but have since realized and embraced the importance of its role in the healthcare delivery system—patient safety through accurate medical documentation in patient records.

Like nearly every other profession, there is a professional association. For MTs it is the AAMT. I joined AAMT very early in my student career. American Association for Medical Transcription's Web site is an invaluable source of information, and I have learned *so much* through my membership, and not just academically. I have learned a great deal about the field, the industry, and the future of medical transcription. When you join AAMT, your membership includes membership in the Student Alliance, which is a special interest group run by students and postgraduates, and caters specifically to the needs of medical transcription students and postgraduates.

There are also state and local chapters of AAMT. These chapters give you the opportunity to gain further education through symposia and provide incredible networking opportunities (refer to the AAMT Web site for a list of state and local chapters).

There is also the Online Chapter of AAMT (OC-AAMT). This chapter offers ongoing continuing education opportunities. These are wonderful opportunities for students and practitioners alike to learn more about the profession, productivity, technology, and the industry. This chapter also has an annual SymposiFest, celebrates Student Week, and offers its members a mentoring program. It is also another fantastic avenue for networking. Through the OC-AAMT, I have worked with and gotten to know so many outstanding medical transcription practitioners through chapter and committee involvement. This year I was appointed to chair a committee and was recently elected by the Board of Directors to fill a vacancy, *and* I am still a

*student*. I have a wonderful mentor through the online chapter's mentoring program (AAMT also has an outstanding E-mentor program), and I have made so many friends.

I have really found my place in the world with medical transcription. I have a career ahead of me that I love and is all my own. My career will not suffer or be affected by my military lifestyle, and it is sensitive to this unpredictable way of life. I have been able to remain in school and will be able to remain employed no matter where the military sends us or how often they move us. It will only take me about 18 months to complete the course work and graduate, versus 8 to 10 years or more to complete a 4-year degree, and I will not spend years paying back student loans. When my husband retires, following at least 20 years of service, I will already be set in my career. It is a comfort to know that when we separate from the military and make the transition back to civilian life, my career will already be established, which is one less thing we have to worry about. Aside from serving the remainder of our active duty years in one place, my husband never being deployed again, or retirement at 20 years as an E9, I can think of nothing that gives me greater happiness, fulfillment, and security than becoming an MT.

For more information about AAMT, the medical transcription profession, the healthcare industry, a listing of approved medical transcription schools, the benefits of AAMT membership, or to find a state or local chapter in your area, please visit [www.aamt.org](http://www.aamt.org).

To learn about the Student Alliance and the activities, leadership opportunities, and to find support for students and postgraduates, visit <http://www.aamt.org/scriptcontent/studentalliance.cfm> and <http://www.aamtstudentalliance.org/forum/index.php>.

To learn about OC-AAMT membership, continuing education, the mentoring program, special events, and the networking group, visit <http://www.aamtonline.org/> and <http://aamtonline.org/forum/index.php>.