

January 18, 2013

LifeBridge Health Finds a Remedy for Transcriptionist Shortage with Voicebrook VoiceOver

Mike Fisch, Senior Analyst

Summary Analysis

- **Problem** – The Department of Pathology at LifeBridge Health struggled to maintain a level of effectiveness and efficiency with transcription and administrative tasks, due to attrition and a regional shortage of available qualified transcriptionists.
- **Solution** – Voicebrook VoiceOver, which provides speech recognition, digital dictation and reporting tools and workflow specifically for Pathology.
- **Rationale** – Voicebrook was the only solution that combined the ease of front-end speech recognition technology with specific templates, vocabularies, workflow and tools that are proven to work in a complex Pathology reporting environment. It integrated directly with the department's Cerner Millennium PathNet AP/LIS.
- **Results** – The department now operates effectively with two transcriptionists instead of six. Administrative backlog is resolved. Pathologists and PAs are more productive than before. Voice commands and customized templates streamline the workflow and the interaction with Cerner PathNet.
- **Observations** – Technology is generally not about eliminating workers, but making the ones you have more productive.

“Now we are more efficient, ultimately. We are more productive than traditional transcription because we are able to complete the reports in a single step. As a result, our pathologists are able to complete more cases the same day than they did while using traditional transcription.”

- Dr. Joseph Nuckols, Medical Director of Pathology, LifeBridge Health

A Shortage of Transcriptionists

Finding qualified transcriptionists was a challenge for the Department of Pathology at LifeBridge Health. Two years ago they had a full staff of six transcriptionists, but that number dwindled to two because of attrition and an inability to find suitable replacement staff. Transcription seemed to be a fading skill on the job market as fewer qualified individuals were available.

According to Dr. Joseph Nuckols, Medical Director of Pathology, “As our number of available transcriptionists decreased, we prioritized transcription for them such that we really did not suffer turnaround-time issues with the surgical pathology reports, but they simply were unavailable to do many of the other tasks assigned to them as administrative assistants.” As a result, the department suffered backlogs of projects like filing verified reports, returning outside slides and other miscellaneous tasks. They needed to find a remedy for this untenable situation.

LifeBridge Health is a health care organization in the Baltimore, Maryland area. It includes Sinai Hospital

of Baltimore and Northwest Hospital. The Department of Pathology at LifeBridge performs more than 20,000 surgical tests annually. It is staffed by eight pathologists, three pathologists' assistants as well as student trainees from the University of Maryland.

The department turned to automated voice dictation as a solution for their staffing problem. If transcription could be done in real time with computer software, that would alleviate the need for manual transcription. They wanted a dependable, functional product. "The major criterion was accuracy," said Dr. Nuckols. "We wanted to either improve efficiency or at least break even. We didn't want something that was going to require pathologists to do more typing and correcting than we did under transcriptionists."

Voicebrook VoiceOver Is the Remedy

In their search, Voicebrook's VoiceOver emerged as the clear choice. VoiceOver includes speech recognition, digital dictation and reporting tools, templates and workflow designed specifically for Pathology. It integrates directly with the department's Cerner Millennium PathNet AP/LIS. VoiceOver also provides the most accurate pathology-specific dictionary on the market, ensuring accuracy of dictation. With the pathologists in favor, they made a proposal to the hospital showing a payback for the system based on reducing the number of transcriptionists from six to two, and moved forward with installation.

The staff adapted well to automated voice dictation. One of the biggest concerns for sites who are considering automated speech recognition solutions is how well the software adapts to different accents and voices. Not only does the VoiceOver solution adapt to all speakers, but William Marple, LifeBridge's AP Manager, commented that even users with significant speech impediments are able to use the system effectively. Once the staff had learned and adapted to the system, they actually liked it better than traditional transcription. "The first week went better than expected, and by the second or third week, we were doing well," said Marple.

"I like the solution. As I said, it works very well for us."

- Dr. Joseph Nuckols

Better than Breakeven

As far as productivity, the staff was fully up to speed within a month. "Fairly quickly we reached a breakeven point. Now we are more efficient, ultimately. We are more productive than traditional transcription because we are able to complete the reports in a single step. As a result, our pathologists are able to complete more cases the same day than they did while using traditional transcription," said Dr. Nuckols.

The pathologists found the VoiceOver Template Center feature nearly as useful as voice recognition. Previously everyone had to use the same shared pool of templates, which was difficult because it required everyone to agree on nomenclature or find other inconvenient workarounds. In addition to providing a set of site-specific templates, VoiceOver enabled users to create their own library of templates. So each person in the department could design templates with the language, names and structure that made sense to them and facilitated their work. Dr. Nuckols now uses templates for 60 to 70% of his reports.

VoiceOver also streamlined the workflow of Cerner Millennium PathNet. Tasks that required a series of keystrokes within PathNet became automated with simple voice commands. In addition, the accuracy of matching patient identity also improved. When a slide opens in PathNet, the pathologist's dictation is automatically attached to it. So the risk of a slide-and-paperwork mismatch, such as a transcriptionist putting dictation with the wrong case, is greatly reduced.

The Department of Pathology now operates effectively with only two transcriptionists. They still do minimal transcription, mostly for staff rotating through the department who are not there long enough to learn the VoiceOver system. However, the majority of their time is freed up for other administrative work.

With the new VoiceOver system in place at LifeBridge, there is no longer a shortage of transcriptionists and the backlog problem is resolved. The pathologists and PAs are even more productive than before. "I like the solution. As I said, it works very well for us," said Dr. Nuckols.

Apropos LLC, based in Boise, Idaho, is the premier IT analyst and marketing services firm for insight into the business value of technology.