

## Banner Thunderbird Medical Center, Glendale, Arizona

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1,211 physicians, 475 active

394 beds

2,400 employees

120,536 patient days

11 million average lines of transcription per year

**Banner Thunderbird Medical Center** has served the Northwest Valley of metropolitan Phoenix since 1983. It is an acute care facility and part of Banner Health, one of the largest nonprofit health care systems in the country. Their mission is to “make a difference in people’s lives through excellent patient care.”

Linda Lewandowski is the Assistant Director of Health Information Management at Banner Thunderbird. She has been with the hospital for 17 years and has 25 years of experience in the industry. Because she began her career as a medical transcriptionist (MT) and medical transcription supervisor, Linda is well versed in the challenges that hospitals face running in-house clinical documentation services. Additionally, Linda has helped Banner Thunderbird evolve its transcription technology, updating systems and processes as new capabilities became available.

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“The thing about global outsourcing  
is that you have somebody on duty

**24** hours, seven  
days a week.”

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Outsourcing helps Banner Thunderbird Medical Center overcome a severe shortage of qualified medical transcriptionists in its metropolitan area.

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In-house becomes intolerable.

In 1999, Banner Thunderbird hit a wall with in-house transcription services. *“We were having a really hard time recruiting and retaining quality transcriptionists and meeting turnaround times,”* Linda said.

With so many Banner hospitals in the area, Banner Thunderbird was literally competing with itself for qualified MTs. In some cases, the same people would leave to go to other hospitals, then come back three or more times.

At one point, Banner Thunderbird tried to alleviate the problem by allowing MTs to work from home. This strategy also failed because, at the time, the hospital lacked the technology necessary to make it work. Many of those MTs went to work for outsourcing companies that provided the equipment, making the shortage even worse.

Ultimately, instead of trying to manage with inadequate staff and increasing dictation backlogs, Thunderbird decided to outsource. Initially, they worked with a company that proved disappointing on several counts. *“Dictation was on the rise. We were just starting to roll out our electronic recording. And the company kept sending the same jobs over and over again, so we’d have Histories & Physicals out there three or four times,”* Linda explained.

Because the initial outsourcing experience was unsatisfactory, Banner Thunderbird decided to end their contract and select a new provider. They created an extensive Request for Proposal (RFP) to address their specific needs and sent it out to large and small outsourcing companies nationwide.

After a comprehensive RFP process, Banner Thunderbird chose HealthScribe, which was acquired by Spheris in 2004. While it was a smaller company than others they considered, *“they had everything we needed: technology, personalized service and quality,”* said Linda.

### **Physician complaints turn into compliments.**

The in-house and initial outsource experiences produced a great deal of frustration for the Banner Thunderbird physicians. “There were double reports, missing reports and lost dictation,” said Linda. The doctors didn’t like waiting or hearing that their dictation had been lost.

The transition to HealthScribe/Spheris solved these problems. Reports track all of the dictation, so Banner Thunderbird can now easily find any given report a doctor may request. Doctors no longer experience the frustration of a lost report.

With outsourcing, Banner Thunderbird also got the speed and accuracy they needed. “On a recent walkthrough with our Spheris account managers, we received numerous compliments about the transcription service. *We heard positive feedback that the turnaround time was very good. And the quality received high praise as well,*” she said.

### **Getting it right.**

Based on her experience as an MT and supervisor, Linda understands first-hand what doctors expect. Specifically, most physicians want their dictation transcribed exactly as they state it. If the doctor refers to the patient by name, it should be transcribed that way. If he or she says “the patient” the report should say “the patient.” What she appreciates about Spheris is that she’s able to give that direction with confidence that it will be followed.

In one instance, a very exacting doctor asked that something be changed on his dictation. “*Spheris was very responsive in getting his job turned right around. He was very happy and didn’t feel like he was dealing with an outsource company,*” she said.

### **Smooth conversion.**

When the entire Banner healthcare network executed a massive software conversion, Banner Thunderbird asked Spheris to help. Spheris assigned a project lead who set up weekly meetings and timelines in preparation for the changeover. The upfront planning made a significant difference. Everything was in place well in advance, and when the conversion began, Spheris stopped transcribing for 48 hours at Thunderbird’s request. Unlike other Banner facilities, where the providers continued to transcribe, Banner Thunderbird’s conversion was virtually seamless and required little back-end adjustment. “Spheris helped us put the pieces together to make sure that we were set to go and that everyone knew their role,” Linda reported.

### **Doctors appreciate global advantages.**

Initially, some Banner Thunderbird physicians were skeptical about global outsourcing through Spheris. The turnaround time changed their opinions. “*They can dictate something, and with the time difference, their work is there when they are ready to sign. They don’t have to wait,*” said Linda.

Spheris’ reporting capabilities also give Thunderbird tools that clarify dictation issues. “We can create a printout of everything a doctor has dictated on any given day. If he tells us we’ve lost the dictation, we can provide documentation that shows he never submitted dictation to start with,” said Linda.

**Personal service and responsiveness  
improve workflow.**

As an assistant HIM director, Linda relies on her partnership with Spheris to get problems solved quickly. For example, when a physician complained about a coding error and inaccurate reports, her Spheris representative delivered all of the reports on a CD. *“It really helps us when we’re getting feedback from physicians that Spheris is there to back us up with the information we need. We’re able to give them [the doctors] the facts, and that’s what they want to hear,”* Linda explained.

Around the clock access also makes a difference to Linda and the Banner Thunderbird team. She knows she can contact Spheris 24/7 and get answers. She also appreciates the personal service and said, *“We have relationships. It’s not just business.”*

Spheris serves more than 500 health systems, hospitals and group practices throughout the U.S. Like Banner Thunderbird, each has its own unique needs and story. Spheris works in partnership with each organization to provide complete solutions that blend technology with workflow management, a global network of transcriptionists and metrics-driven service. All to streamline the flow of critical information and enhance patient care.

For more information, call 1.800.513.7864 or visit [www.spheris.com](http://www.spheris.com)

The Spheris logo features the word "Spheris" in a serif font. The "S" is a large, dark blue letter. The "pheris" is in a smaller, lighter blue serif font. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the "s".