

Using Palm-Based Technology in a Chronic Pain Practice

To the editor,

I am a nurse practitioner treating chronic pain patients with a variety of ailments, including chronic back pain, neuropathy, chronic regional pain syndrome, and migraines. In addition to chronic pain, the patients are being treated for other medical problems, including diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, and hypertension just to name a few. Most of our patients are treated with a variety of medications, which makes it difficult to prescribe additional medications without checking for interactions.

I have been using a Palm-based computer for approximately 3 years, and I want to share my experience with this technology.

I think Palm-based programs have become essential tools for those nurse practitioners who want to achieve the best nursing and physician support practice. First of all, I believe that the patient who sees you while you're using a Palm-based program is going to feel more comfortable with your services. However, it is important that you always share that information and knowledge you obtain from the Palm with your patient. Second, Palm-based programs help enormously with new symptom diagnosis and management. Take, for example, the patient who came to us very sedated and slightly confused. Before I ordered laboratory tests and a CT scan of the brain, I ran a drug interaction "Palm-check." The patient was receiving Topamax for chronic migraine and Depakote for bipolar disorder. I looked in my Palm to check for drug interactions and side effects from these 2 medications, and the Palm prompted me to check for the ammonia serum level, which indeed was elevated in this particular patient. Handheld technology has taken medicine to a new level; it gives you the ability to have references in the "palm" of your hand. Handheld technology gives you the ability to check 30 drug interactions.

Also, reviewing laboratory values and the consequences from drug interactions can be very cumbersome. If you use the Palm-based programs Five-Minute Consult (from Epocrates DX version)

or Merck Manual (from Merck Medicus), you do not have to carry around a book.

Palm-based programs are as up-to-date as you make them, since they require you to continually update the programs by interfacing them with the Internet. Some programs such as Epocrates Essentials allow you to review the diagnosis, get the *International Classification of Diseases*, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes, and review treatments including medications. This is an integrated program that allows the user to go from the diagnosis listed in the diagnosis section to the medication section and back again without losing the initial diagnosis being reviewed. Also, you can find out if your patient has a health plan that requires prior authorization on certain medications and no authorization for other medications; this could save hours of phone calls for office staff.

The Palm-based programs that I am currently using are as follows:

- Epocrates Rx: this is a free program that can be downloaded and that provides medication information for over 3300 medications as well as other needed information to prescribe medications safely. The information available at your fingertips is the ability to find medications by class and drug name. Finding on- or off-label information, pediatric, adult, renal, and hepatic dosing is also available. Other information available about medications includes adverse reactions, interactions with up to 30 drugs, contraindications, metabolism, excretion, and pregnancy safety. If the cost of a medication is an issue, you can check the cost and which medications are on the formulary (including Medicare Part D companies). Epocrates Mobile CME gives you the ability to get CME credits on a variety of topics anywhere you carry your handheld device. This can be downloaded for free at Epocrates.com.
- Epocrates Essentials proprietary version: this version allows you to integrate 4 programs, which include Epocrates Rx as above, disease management by reviewing signs and symptoms or disease-specific program including ICD-9 codes using

Griffith's 5-minute Clinical Consult and Massachusetts General Hospital's Laboratory of Computer Science, and one more bonus, Epocrates ID, which gives treatment for infectious diseases. Med Tool Applications are programs to allow the assessment of bone health, intravenous drip calculator, Epocrates Mobile CME, GFR Calculator, HTN QuickRef, Insulin Dosing Calculator, NCI Tumor Staging Reference, Physician Psychiatry Compendia, Stat Cholesterol, and Temperature Conversion Calculator. This is available at Epocrates. com.

- Merck Medicus: offers free access to MDs, NPs and PAs for the *Merck Manual*, a laboratory program, Medline Journal Search program, and

Journal abstract review with multiple journals. The Web site is Merckmedicus.com.

- Skyscape: offers a variety of PDA programs for a variety of specialties available at Skyscape.com.
- PDR.net: has access to PDR mobile and Micromedex.

I hope this information will prompt medical providers to use Palm-based technology to make their practice more efficient.

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