Y2K BUG – Reality or Fiction

Have you had your PC at work or home checked for the *Y2K* bug?

If not, maybe after reading through this article, you will make up your mind to do so. The whole problem with the y2k bug is that your PC may not recognize the shift from 31/12/1999 to 01/01/2000 as most PC hardware was configured to read the last two digits of the years. Hence, year 2000 would be recognized as "00" which takes your PC back to 1900 and with this change, dates on your computer documents may be affected. Imagine, file records of patients in your practice - no longer available or recognized after 01 January 2000, as the PC starts recording data for 1 January 1900, when you were not even born. How would you know if your PC hardware is y2k compliant? There are 4 areas in your PC, where y2k problems can pop up namely the BIOS, OS, APPLICATIONS and DATA.

How to check the BIOS

Every time your PC boots, the machine's BIOS read the date from the battery-operated real-time clock chip. Trouble is, the clock increments only the last two digits of the year; the first two are stored separately in the century byte. So although the real-time clock will correctly flip the last two digits from 99 to 00 after the New Year, the century byte will stick on "19" i.e. year 1900. To test your PC BIOS if it is y2k compliant, you may download a small free application called "y2k test" and run it on your system. This software can be located at: - http://www.securenet.org/

If you find out that your PC's BIOS is not y2k compliant, then go to the Symantec site to download - Norton 2000 BIOS fix. It is a free download and follow the instructions to install the "patch" on to your system. The URL is: - http://www.symantec.com/sabu/n2000r/index

How to check the OS

Windows 95 and 98 - the operating systems - are almost but not quite y2k ready. One possible glitch is that, by default Windows uses a short date format of mm/dd/yy. For Windows to comprehend the year 2000, all you need to do is simple. Just change the format to mm/dd/yyyy in the Regional Settings Control Panel applet and this should solve the problem i.e. click on Start ‡ Settings ‡ Control Panel ‡ Regional Settings ‡ "change Date tab" to mm/dd/yyyy.

How to check the APPLICATIONS

The majority of applications have some sort of y2k problem ranging from misinterpretation of two-digit numbers as early 20th century dates to others not working at all. Although it is possible to resolve these problems by upgrading to the newest versions, this may cost lots of money. Another option would be to use a y2k utility to locate and offer fixes for non-compliant applications. The utility will compare the software on your hard drive against a list of applications with known y2k problems. Software giant -"Microsoft" has issued a warning that some of its products are not "fully y2k compliant". The following applications fall into this category: MS Access version 2, MS Word version 5, and Windows Explorer which has a two-digit format for the dates. The MS Excel versions 5, 95 and 97 have problems as they assume any date entered between 00 and 30 as already in the 21st century and any above that to be in this current century. Microsoft is offering a free CD with the patches to fix the various y2k problems. Simply complete your details on the following web site: http://204.118.122/y2kcd/y2kcd.asp and a free CD would be mailed to you as soon as possible.

How to check the DATA

Data is the biggest y2k problem and dates are the "difficulty". - most trouble with data resides in databases and spreadsheets. A good y2k utility will point out any two-digit dates and change them, if necessary. There are a number of such utilities that can be downloaded from the Internet. The following web sites are useful:

1. http://www.start.at/m2s-soft/
2. http://www.nsm.ie/homeframe.htm
3. http://www.bugfix.co.uk
4. http://www.millenniumquest.com/

Before you rush off to buy any y2k software, as a good clinician - first make the diagnosis of "what and where" is the y2k problem on your PC. Thereafter, check on the Internet for free downloads to solve the problem and only purchase the appropriate software, if the problem can't be solved with the free downloads. I hope that this article has helped to unravel some of the mysticism around the y2k bug. Get your PC "y2k compliant"- It is the right thing to do.

In the next issue, the focus will be on "How to protect your PC from viruses". The advent of e-mail has made the transfer of viruses relatively easy via file attachments. It would be nice to know how to avoid infecting other PCs from your workstation.

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