



From the editor • Van die redakteur

Computer talk

Since hearing the opinion from a computer salesman that South Africa, next to Germany, is the country with the highest rate of computerised medical practices, I have engaged in listening to computer talk. Four groups of general practitioners seem to emerge.

Those who have one and use it fully. Listening to them talk evokes an awe-filled admiration that turns into jealousy and ultimately despair. There is just no possibility for ordinary mortals to achieve such levels of success! The list of achievements are endless:

The PC manages the billing process. Its use has, after two years, been extended to do all the word processing for the practice, including the writing of referral letters. The doctor is automatically alerted when specific actions are due, such as the next pap-smear, or immunisation. Patients can then be notified if they do not present themselves within a predetermined time, with a letter that is produced automatically and personally for the patient. Budgeting for the practice as well as the monthly reconciliation with the bank statement is now done automatically and takes a few minutes! Within the next year or so they hope to develop a system of clinical audit that will help practices to monitor their standard of clinical practice. It is envisaged that this will also give some data that will help in negotiations with medical aid schemes. Some even talk about the madness of putting their full clinical record on computer.

Doesn't the idea alone exhaust you?

By this time you imagine that you are talking to a man who has square eyes and is busy with divorce proceedings. But no, he seems to be quite normal and is happily married.

No, it's only that you are one of those **who**

has one but doesn't know how to use it effectively. Listening to this group one hears some classic statements. "I already have a computer for the accounts; I'll have to buy another one for word processing".

"My system is not doing what I really want it to do but I've put so much effort into it that I cannot change it any more".

There are those who have bought the hardware but have never used it! Remember, these things depreciate, so cut your losses and sell it *or* hire someone who can make it work.

This group, and I find myself perilously close to it, reminds me of the man who daily hires a 60 seater bus to take two people two kilometres to and from work.

Then there are **those who don't have one and should not**, mainly those who are doing well without it and who are close to retirement. Other non-owners really belong to the second group who have yet to meet a "good" salesman. If you are that kind of person and one who has to do everything himself, don't buy.

Lastly, there are **those who do not have one and should**. If you potentially belong to the first group and plan to be in practice for a few more years, you are doing yourself and your patients a disservice by not having a computerised system.

The problem is how will I know beforehand?

The solution to the problem is simple: Know yourself, your needs and your practice style. Then do some serious homework and shop around for a sympathetic salesperson. This will obviate you pulling out your hair later, after having spent a packet of money on the wrong equipment.

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