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## Editorial: a book review – PDAs and smartphones

Sue Childs, Editor

sue.childs@northumbria.ac.uk

*'For doctors, PDAs are possibly the most clinically appropriate of all the computer devices created.'*

The RSM Press has recently published a guide<sup>1</sup> to the use of personal digital assistants (PDAs) and smartphones in the clinical setting. As the book blurb says: *'Handheld computers, or PDAs, are computers small enough to hold in your hand or fit into your pocket. Smartphones are PDAs which also allow the user to make and receive phone calls. For doctors, PDAs are possibly the most clinically appropriate of all the computer devices created.'* The aim of the book is to help clinicians get the best out of these technologies.

A good feature of the book is that it is backed up with online video tutorials, available from the book's Web site. These tutorials demonstrate the written instructions in the book. The authors have based the book's content on the annual handheld workshop that they present at the RSM <[www.handheldsfordoctors.com/rsm/](http://www.handheldsfordoctors.com/rsm/)>. Another useful feature is the clinical vignettes at the end of each

chapter that illustrate the use of PDAs in real-life situations. Each chapter gives the basic instructions for using each PDA feature. This is then followed by advanced uses of the feature and additional software, where relevant, to extend the options available. The book chapters comprise:

- **Buying a handheld computer:** how to find a PDA with the required features at a reasonable price
- **The diary:** how to use the diary function to keep track of appointments, set up recurring appointments, use reminders

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and alarms, share data with others by synchronising your PDA with a PC, so a secretary can arrange appointments or a colleague can have information about a joint activity

- **The address book:** how to use the diary to set up contact details, categorise contacts, share addresses with others
- **The task list:** how to use the task list to organise your activities, set priorities and due dates, categorise tasks
- **Taking notes:** how to use the note taking feature to support life-long learning by recording information from lectures, textbooks and ward rounds
- **Smartphones:** smartphones are PDAs with a telephone function, enabling you to make phone calls, check emails and surf the Web, e.g. to read journal articles
- **Choosing extra software:** how to find, download and install relevant software from all the extra available software for PDAs; as the authors say, if you find you are reaching for a piece of paper rather than using your PDA to carry out an activity, then you probably need additional software for your PDA
- **Medical references:** the storage capacity of PDAs is sufficient to accommodate your favourite textbooks or reference works and to store organisational documentation. This chapter describes how to obtain free or commercial texts and how to organise documents in your PDA
- **Security:** portable devices are vulnerable to loss or theft and so can be a security risk if they contain confidential information. This chapter describes techniques for keeping data secure, including the use of encryption software
- **Databases:** how to use someone else's database, or set up your own database, to store, sort, search and retrieve information, and to share database information with colleagues

- **Medical records:** though a PDA is not a good tool for sharing traditional patient records it will be ideal for electronic records, an initiative still in its infancy. This chapter discusses the principles of handling medical records on a PDA.

This book is a very practical introduction on how to start using a PDA or smartphone. However, people currently using PDAs could also benefit from the information contained in this book. Though geared to doctors, other clinical staff would also find this book of benefit.

## Reference

1. Al-Ubaydli M, Paton C. *The doctor's PDA and smartphone handbook. A guide to handheld healthcare*. RSM Press, 2006. ISBN: 1-85315-686-8 (paperback), £12.95 <[www.rsmjournals.co.uk/bkpd.htm](http://www.rsmjournals.co.uk/bkpd.htm)>.

## 'EU legislation should be informed by scientific evidence not Internet searches'

<[www.royalsoc.ac.uk/news.asp?id=5000](http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/news.asp?id=5000)>

'The Royal Society ... [recently] expressed its concern .... that a prominent report which cites 'internet searches' and 'circumstantial anecdotes' as a basis for some of its recommendations could influence changes to EU legislation'. The report was produced by the European Food Safety Authority to inform legislation on the protection of animals used in scientific research.

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## Contributions

Articles and editorial correspondence should be sent to: Susan Childs, Information Society Research Community, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Room 007, Pandon Building, Northumbria University, Camden Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1XE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)191 227 3761, Fax: +44 (0)191 243 7630. Email: [sue.childs@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:sue.childs@northumbria.ac.uk)

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