Medical Students Find Power in Their Palm: PDAs in a Clinical Rotation

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Opportunity

Following an initial conversation with the Course Masters, librarians led the effort to introduce handheld devices into the third year curriculum. This partnership involves the Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library and the University of Utah School of Medicine.

Planning

- Explored ways handheld devices could be integrated into the pediatric clinical rotation
- Established a timeline for implementation
- Identified technical issues
- Selected pertinent software
- Outlined costs and potential funding sources
- Planned for faculty training needs

Funding

Eccles Library and School of Medicine (SOM) jointly funded the purchase of Palm Tungsten C PDAs and software licenses

SOM Educational Resource Development Council funded Pediatric faculty devices	$ 3,000
SOM Educational Computing Committee funded student devices and software licenses	$ 9,750
Library funded library faculty devices	$ 4,000
Total cost	$16,567

Course Content

Course goals and objectives

Session I: Building Your Palm

Session II: Assigned application evaluation

Session III: Student selected application evaluation

Session IV: Searching the literature for evidence

Session V: Evaluating the literature

Technical Issues

- Selecting appropriate device
- Software licenses, negotiation and configuration
- Coordinating with IT staff to create desktop image to expedite class setup
- Configure PDA's for first session: hardware/software
- Circulation of devices and equipment support
- Student privacy: reset devices after each rotation

Challenges

- First session class setup is very time intensive
- Training class facilitators and library staff
- Evolving software options
- Student device and operating system preferences
- Working with software vendors to match course needs
- No standardization for application installation
- PDA damage and loss

Implementation

- Students issued Palm device for six week pediatric rotation
- Library faculty provide instruction on basic functionality and clinical applications
- Students learn organizational features, installation processes, document conversion, and clinical applications
- Students teach the use of clinical applications to their peers
- Attending physician reviews evidence-based literature evaluation using Palm applications
- Course corrections and enhancements are ongoing

Outcome

- Students learn the value of new technologies
- Students continue to develop their critical evaluation skills
- Student surveys and faculty interviews indicate that students perceive the course as worthwhile
- Library faculty have a unique opportunity to interact with the medical students
- Library leadership promotes leading edge technologies in SOM curriculum