

LESSONS LEARNED ON INTRODUCING PERSONAL DIGITAL ASSISTANTS IN THE INTERNAL MEDICINE CLERKSHIP

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Focus: Experiences on implementing PDA's in clinical education

Introduction: In May 2005 we started a study which evaluated the use of personal digital assistants (PDA's) in the Internal Medicine Clerkship at Leiden Medical School. In this study all students entering the clerkship at the Leiden University Medical Center were offered to borrow a PDA for a period of 10 weeks. The PDA was pre-formatted with Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine, pharmacology data, Archimedes medical calculator and the Dutch Standards for General Medicine. Usage was evaluated using a questionnaire at the end of the clerkship.

Results: The study has been completed in December 2006 and all questionnaires have been processed. 97 students have participated in the study. Only 9 % of these students possessed a PDA of their own; the others hardly had any experience with such a device. This clearly indicates that PDA's are not as widespread among students as sometimes is suggested. Due to the relative high unfamiliarity with the device, many students asked for a detailed introduction on usage of the PDA at the beginning of the clerkship. The results of the questionnaire show that the students hardly used the PDA at moments of direct patient contact but mainly during discussion sessions and in their spare time at the hospital. The medical applications were highly appreciated and were used most often. Many students in the study indicated that due to the pilot they were planning to use a PDA in subsequent clerkships and in future medical practice.

At the start of the study no network facilities for the PDA's were offered. Due to the lack of connectivity the (stand alone) Outlook agenda functionality was used by only a small group of students and email programs were not possible. Without these functionalities the added value of a PDA was perceived quite low resulting in low acceptance of the device. During 2006 the online Outlook agenda functionality was made available, initially as a wired connection through one shared workstation and later on using a wireless connection. Expanding the functionality clearly increased acceptance of the device.

Conclusions: From our experiences in this study a few advises to institutions considering starting using PDA's in education can be formulated. Instruction of new users in using the device is absolutely necessary. Applications provided should be highly relevant to the daily activities of the users. And finally, network connectivity (preferable wireless) is essential for a successful introduction of PDA technology in an educational setting.

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