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Title: **Handheld computer use in a family medicine clerkship.**

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Abstract: PURPOSE: The objectives of this study were to track students' use of medical and nonmedical personal digital assistant (PDA) software and to obtain students' ratings of the usefulness of PDAs in a family medicine clerkship. METHOD: During the academic year 2001-02, third-year clerkship students at the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine were loaned PDAs equipped with company-installed software, such as a date book and address book. Additional software was installed (Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult, ePocrates qRx, ePocrates qID, iSilo, HanDBase, MedCalc, and Application Usage). Pre- and post-orientation questionnaires and a post-rotation evaluation measured students' comfort level, the perceived usefulness, and ratings of programs on their PDA. Application Usage tracked the number of minutes and times students used each software program. RESULTS: Eighty-five students completed the study. They rated ePocrates qRx and Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult the most useful medical software programs. PDAs were rated as "almost always" enhancing the clerkship experience. Students reported the PDA altered the way they accessed clinical information and that every few days it helped them understand a clinical discussion. Experience with computer technology was correlated with PDA use. CONCLUSIONS: This study objectively demonstrates clerkship students' use of PDA resources. Students' use mirrors their assessment of the value of the software. Although PDAs and software programs can be an expense, it is a worthwhile educational resource as evaluated by the medical student.

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