

Purchasing suggestions for students Interested in PDA's

Welcome and congratulations on your acceptance to Penn Med. Among the many items and choices confronting you are decisions regarding computer technology. Included in this are a new class of computing devices called PDA (personal digital assistant). These small pocket sized devices made popular by the Palm corporation have begun to see broad adoption in medical practice primarily in the clinical settings where students, residents and fellows as well as attending use them for a variety of purposes including electronic references/textbooks, schedules, access to patient data, email and so forth. The purchase of these devices is not required.

To take help assist you in any purchasing decisions, we have created a table organized by class year, software function and hardware platform. This list is not exhaustive but includes common functionality. Additional resources and reviews of hardware and software are available from a number of web sites including;
 PDAMD.com (<http://www.pdamd.com/>)
 Medical PDA (<http://www.medicalpocketpc.com/>)

Function	Class Year	Platform
Course schedule	MS1-2	Palm (automated) Pocket PC manual download
Course documents as Word files	MS1-2	Palm and Pocket PC
Renal Cases	MS2	Palm Only, Also Palm emulator on lab computers
Drug Guide	MS2-4	Palm (free version, pay version more detail) Pocket PC (no free version, \$49 version only)
Medical dictionary	MS2, 3 and 4	Palm and Pocket PC
Journal articles as PDF from library	MS1, 2, 3 and 4	Palm and Pocket PC
Textbooks (Clerkships)	MS3, MS4	Palm and Pocket PC All major titles

Harrison's, 5 Minute consult, Washington Manual...		available on both platforms
Email via wireless 802.11b	MS1-4	Pocket PC can be wireless via 802.11b card (see wireless connectivity below) Palm – now offers Tungsten C with built in 802.11b wireless
Up to Date at HUP via wireless 802.11b	MS3, 4	Pocket PC only. Currently do not support wireless palm
Access to laboratory data at HUP via wireless 802.11b available summer 2003	MS3, 4	Pocket PC and Palm with 802.11b wireless

Wireless Networks:

The University as well as the health system has begun to install wireless networks in several areas. In addition to using these wireless networks via a PDA, they are equally useful when accessed via a laptop computer equipped with wireless network adapters and cards. Instructions for accessing these networks can be found at

<http://vc2000-12.med.upenn.edu/vc2000/wifi/>.

Location

University

Biomedical Library

Van Pelt Library

Biopond

Wireless

yes, all reading areas

yes, partial

yes

Health System

HUP

yes, in clinical areas at University Hospital only

Conclusions:

In general, either platform will serve very nicely for access to basic functionality including documents, calendars, contact lists and portable textbooks. If your needs include access to wireless networks (email, Up to date or Laboratory data) then a Pocket PC with wireless 802.11b

communication or a Palm with integrated 802.11b wireless communication are good choices.

Palm OS

Advantages:

- Lots of freeware and software
- Johns Hopkins antibiotic guide is free
- PatientKeeper for PDA is free (Desktop is \$299)
- Palm is cheapest available PDA
- Larger market share -- Currently, most popular PDA among students and housestaff
- Intuitive, easy to use
- Integrates with Microsoft Office products

Disadvantages

- Use of wireless markedly reduces battery life (3-4 hr continuous use only)
- UpToDate is not available on either wireless or add-on storage device
- Memory is very limited on low end models (e.g., will not support ePocrates)
- Less computing power than PocketPC on low end models
- Short battery life is an important issue, if using a wireless network. A long life battery is key along with an extra portable recharger on either platform

PocketPC

Advantages:

- Wireless is more accessible
- Greater computing power
- Larger storage devices available
- UpToDate can be installed on either storage device or accessed via wireless network for no charge
- PatientKeeper is free
- Johns Hopkins antibiotic guide is free
- MedView available for wireless access to lab data
- Seamless integration with Outlook and office products (Calendar, contacts and email). With 802.11b wireless connection, email can be done with PDA)

Disadvantages

- Models are more expensive than Palm
- Less software and freeware; however, commercial medical software (i.e., textbooks, reference material is available for both)
- Short battery life is an important issue, if using a wireless network. An additional long life battery is key along with an extra portable recharger on either platform (Palm or Pocket PC)