book reviews

DiagnosisPro 5.0 CD-ROM
by MedTech USA, Inc

Review by Arnold N Singer, MD

The special price of DiagnosisPro at this time is $249.95. Windows version of the program will need 50 MB of storage space. The handheld version needs 18 MB, which is generally used from a Flashcard. Version 5.0 is compatible with Windows and Pocket PC Handheld; Mac version is not available for version 5.0. (Evaluation copy of DiagnosisPro 5.0 CD ROM provided at no cost by MedTech USA Inc, Los Angeles, CA.)

I have owned the previous version of *DiagnosisPro 4.0* for the past two years, having purchased it after one of its physician-designers gave an enthusiastic presentation of the program at a medical meeting I attended. At the presentation, I was duly impressed by the facility with which the creator of the program whipped through differential diagnosis with rapid expansion of information about the disease—but then the program sat, unused, in my computer for the next two years. With renewed anticipation, I recently loaded version 5.0 of the program for review to see what had been added to the upgrade.

The basic program performs differential diagnosis using signs, symptoms, laboratory reports, x-ray findings, and other related tests and disease attributes: With a click of the mouse, a complete differential diagnosis is displayed on the screen. With another click of the mouse, the differential diagnosis can be narrowed to the most likely diagnosis. Alternatively, each diagnosis can be listed in outline form with synonyms, a general description, clinical description of signs and symptoms, laboratory findings, diagnostic tests, subject pathophysiology, and treatment. In addition, an outlined discussion of each topic in any clinical setting can be opened by a mouse click. The content is linked to the current *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*[1] for more complete reading of the topic as well as to *MEDLINE*[2] for further research into the topic. Individual patient data files may be completed and stored, and sections of the text can be mailed electronically to others.

The newest and best features of the *DiagnosisPro 5.0* (MedTech USA Inc, Los Angeles, CA) are disease review and disease comparison, two features which enable quick review of a disease or direct comparison of two different diseases. I found this feature to be both the most useful and the most attractive of the upgraded program.

I think that this program represents a useful advance over the previous version, 4.0. The greatest utility of the program will be to advance the learning curve of neophyte physicians or medical students; however, even an experienced physician contemplating a difficult case can meaningfully use this program. The program is comprehensive; after becoming familiar with it, the user realizes that the program can be used to expand the scope of differential diagnosis for any patient.

The practicality of finding time to use the program and to reflect on the depth and profundity of its information is another issue, however. Limited time is available to see a patient in the office or even during inpatient rounds: Considering the patient's diagnosis, ordering laboratory tests, prescribing treatment, and discussing these matters with the patient is often done in less than 15 minutes. To use a computer program to review one case and to research the diagnostic possibilities takes considerably longer, although with increased familiarity—especially if quickly viewing the leading differential diagnostic possibilities—the clinician may find this program excellent for the purpose.

Overall, I do recommend *DiagnosisPro 5.0* CD-ROM. ❖

References

1. Braunwald E, Fauci AS, Kasper DL, Hauser SL, Longo DL, Jameson JL, editors. Harrison's principles of internal medicine. 15th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill; 2001. Available as Harrison's Online on the World Wide Web: www.harrisonsonline.com.
2. Available on the World Wide Web: www.ncbi.nlmnih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi.

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