

Computers Working smarter

The use of practice support tools can improve patient outcomes.

THERE has been much positive feedback about the National Primary Care Collaboratives program, a Federal Government initiative with its emphases on diabetes, secondary prevention of CHD and better access for patients to primary care.

Most participants are converts and in the division in which I work some of the results for practices to date have shown:

- Increased practice income.
- Improved care for patients with diabetes and heart disease.
- Improved team work, both within the practice and with external agencies.
- Improved understanding and management of clinical computer software, especially the need for data cleansing and using consistent coded diagnoses.

Two decision-support tools are available as part of the collaboratives program — the PEN Clinical Audit Tool and the Practice Health Atlas.

PEN Clinical Audit Tool

In my mind this is the most exciting tool because it gives you identified data, such as:

- Identifying patient demographic and clinical cohorts, for example, patient names of ‘Smoking status not recorded’, or patient names of ‘No allergy recorded’.
- Listing patients with diabetes on ACE inhibitors.

The difference with this tool is that it creates pie and bar charts, and by clicking on a wedge or bar of the chart you can get a list of patient names that can be immediately printed or exported as an Excel spreadsheet.

In the graph (above left) we have identified 54 patients aged 45-49 who have a BMI that puts them in the obese range.

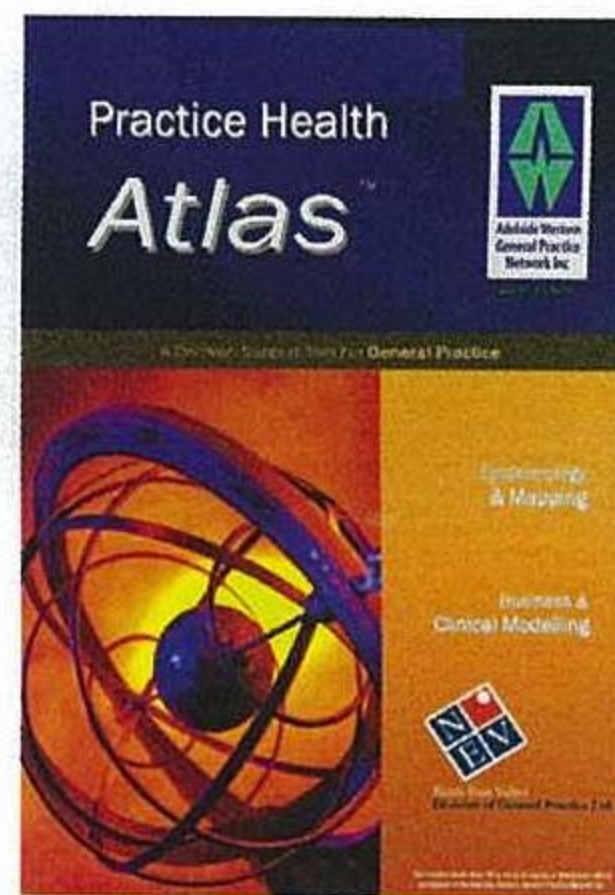
By clicking on the red bar in the graph the program can produce a list of those patients and recall them for the 45+ health check.



MR NOEL STEWART is the information management program officer for the North East Valley Division of General Practice, Melbourne.

Several Victorian divisions are negotiating to buy this tool to use in their practices and hopefully the same will happen in other state and territories.

Check out the tool’s web site at www.pencs.com.au



Practice Health Atlas

Several divisions have been promoting the Primary Health Atlas (PHA), which is a decision-support tool that can analyse the practice’s patient demographic/clinical data together with its item number use and with Australian Bureau of Statistics population health data.

The PHA can act as a guide in answering the following questions:

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- How much does the practice use Enhanced Primary Care item numbers, Service Incentive Payments and Practice Incentive Program payments?
- How could the practice provide additional services to patients in a way that makes good clinical, practical and business sense?
- What is the relationship between health need profiles (eg, asthma patients or those on more than five medications) and the practice’s potential business income?

The North East Valley Division also provides an executive summary, which provides recommendations, such as:

- There are some areas where data cleansing and improved recording may be particularly beneficial. These include inactivating patients not seen for more than three years, recording mental health diagnoses, recording some aspects of diabetes care, recording diagnoses of osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.
- There are substantial income increases still possible in relation to diabetes and asthma.
- The practice may wish to look at increasing the rate of Home Medicines Reviews both for income and health purposes.

My recommendation for 2008 is to seize the opportunity to join the collaboratives and take advantage of these decision-support tools if you get the chance. ●