

## Computers

## Narrowing the search

Advanced searches can help you select patient demographics.

**M**ANY practices use the database search function of their clinical software to find particular groups of patients.

These groups may include:

- All patients over 75 years for item number 700 (annual 75-plus health assessment).
- Patients aged 45–49 years for item 717 (the 45-year-old health check).
- Female patients aged 18–26 for Gardasil vaccination.
- All patients with a particular condition, to produce a disease register.

Once these lists are generated you can use them to mail

merge to send letters to nominated patients.

You can further refine your searches using some of the lesser known features of database searches. The following examples are for Medical Director, but other clinical software packages have similar functions.

In MD3, with no patient record open, go to the 'Search' menu, select 'Patient' (MD2: Search > Databases).

Click on the 'Other demographic criteria' button, which takes you to the Patient Search Details window (see image) so you can do more detailed searches.

Use the Patient Search window (left) to do detailed searches. Ticking the 'Not seen since' box (below) lets you inactivate patients who have not visited the practice for some time.

In 'Date of Birth' type 91..94 — this will find all patients born between 1991 and 1994. Or type 22/06/1931..22/07/1931 to

find all patients born between those dates.

You could use this function to find patients who will turn 75 in the next month and



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send them a reminder that they are eligible for a free health check.

In 'Address', type a patient's address to find all other patients living at the same address. A GP once asked me about this because he worked with refugees. He had a patient who was a hepatitis B carrier and needed to contact all patients at the same address to immunise them.

In 'Surname' type A..G. This will find all patients whose surnames begin with the letters between A and G. This can be useful if you don't want to send all reminder letters at the same time.

The problem with this hint is that it only works in Medical Director 2. HCN has been advised through the MD Helpdesk of this anomaly and

the issue has been logged. There are no guarantees it will be resolved soon.

Another handy feature of a database search is to find patients who haven't visited the practice for some time, say the past three years, and inactivate them so they do not affect statistics and accurate data retrieval. It also saves sending out needless recall and reminder letters.

In the Patient Search window click on the 'Not seen since' box and overtype the current year with, say, 2004. Click on the 'Search' button. Once the list is displayed click on the 'Print' button. You have to inactivate patients manually, because MD2 and Pracsoft (for MD3) won't allow a bulk inactivation. ●