

Computers

All in the look

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It's worth taking the time to make documents look good, as well as clinically accurate.

Australian
Doctor.

ACCURATE clinical information is essential in an electronic medical record, particularly when providing patient information to other health providers.

The way in which information is presented is also important, particularly making it grammatically accurate and laying out the document so it is visually pleasing and easy to read. Sloppiness can reflect poorly on the GP and the practice's professional standards.

I have seen some appallingly presented referrals and care plans, with no capital letters, no spaces after punctuation and

spelling mistakes.

Word processing clangers, which can often be made in an attempt to make a document look "pretty", include:

- Pressing 'Enter' several times to get to the next page, which creates large gaps in the text when a document is later edited. Put in a page break instead. Place the cursor where you want the next page to start and from the 'Insert' menu select 'Page Break'. Easier still, press 'Control' + 'Enter' — the keyboard shortcut for a page break.
- Pressing 'Enter' at the end of a line and then the 'Tab' key. This also creates gaps in the wrong place throughout the text when it is edited. Use the number or bullet buttons in the toolbar.

- Pressing the 'Tab' key or space bar several times to either line up text to the line above or to centre the text. Learn how to set your tabs in the ruler or, if trying to centre text, use the centre alignment button.

If the space bar is pressed several times to line up text, the text will be all over the place when the document is printed. There is no need to press the space bar twice after a full stop, because computers use proportional spacing (the letter 'm' takes up more space than the letter 'i'). Electric typewriters had mono-spacing (all characters took up the same amount of space), so double spaces were used to separate sentences more clearly.

The golden rule is if you press the space bar, 'Enter' or 'Tab' keys more than once, you are doing something wrong.

Visual presentation of information can, in some cases, have equal importance to content. This may be less so with medical information, where accuracy of clinical information is paramount. However, providing information in a grammatically correct and visually pleasing manner will reflect positively on you and your practice.

It also means other professionals who receive well-presented correspondence are more likely to take better notice of what you have to say. This was highlighted recently at a briefing for GPs by a law firm, which said a judge was more likely to look less favourably on a doctor if the doctor's clinical records were poorly presented. ●