

Information Technology

Taking your tablets

Keeping up with technology can be a hard pill to swallow, but sometimes it's for your own good.

GPs are beginning to prescribe themselves one of the new generation of tablet computers.

There are a number of tablets to choose from based on different software technologies: Apple's iPad, based on the iPhone operating system is probably the most popular, followed by Google's Android, based on the Linux operating system used by Samsung in their Galaxy tablet. Microsoft's Windows runs on devices such as the HP Slate, and BlackBerry has announced it will soon join the party.

Meanwhile, US research suggests physicians are five times more likely to purchase and make use of tablets than the general population, and it is the Apple iPad that is leading the charge.

The iPad has the advantage that its operating system — built on the iPhone — has been around for a few years.

The other tablets are first-generation while the iPad is moving into a second- and even third-generation platform.

Personally, I love the fact that, at home or on the road, I can check my email in a few seconds, compared with the minutes needed to boot up a laptop or PC. The iPad has a 1GHz processor, while HP's offering is even faster and has a massive 2GB of RAM — pretty good for touch screen technology.

Laptops, notebooks and desktop computers still have their place, but the new generation of tablets has plenty of advantages. I've already mentioned their faster boot-up speeds, but how about their LCD touch screens? And what about their almost luxurious battery life? In general practice, one of the biggest advantages of a tablet is the ease with which you can pass it around and show your patients the screen. You can also use a stylus to write on your tablet or connect it to a projector to show streaming or downloaded video.

For this article I spoke with Dr Lindsey Hyde, a Melbourne-based GP and self-confessed gadget junkie about how she uses her iPad. Not

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long into our discussion, it quickly became apparent that Dr Hyde uses her iPad for a variety of applications, including social, recreational and professional purposes.

Her day might begin with using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as checking newspapers and medical journals.

During her consultations with patients, she might use the program Netter Anatomy as an illustrative tool. She will also use Google or Safari to browse the web and make use of the excellent graphics on sites like DermNetNZ (dermnetnz.org) to both assist in diagnosis and demonstrate to patients various dermatological conditions.

Some doctors love working with new technologies, some are totally confused and others just ignore their existence. My belief is that it doesn't matter which of the above categories you fall into, it is inevitable that a tablet will soon be very much a part of your professional and personal existence. ●

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