Letters to the Editor

The Journal welcomes Letters to the Editor; if found suitable, they will be published as space allows. Letters should be typed double-spaced, should not exceed 400 words, and are subject to abridgment and other editorial changes in accordance with journal style.

Use of a Word Processor

To the Editor:

During the fourth week of January 1980, most physicians received a letter from Smith, Kline and French Laboratories marked "Urgent." This letter informed us that the drug ticrynafen (Selacryn®) was being recalled because it could produce adverse effects considered life threatening to patients who were using it.

How could a physician in practice identify which of his patients were taking this medication? At our family practice center we were able to acknowledge within 24 hours 169 patients who had hypertension, 5 of whom were taking ticrynafen. These five patients were then notified shortly thereafter that they should discontinue this medication since it might be potentially harmful to them.

We were able to accomplish the objective of locating those patients who were taking ticrynafen by using an IBM word processor called System 6. This unit is not cost prohibitive and can be operated by a person who needs only standard office skills and a one- to two-week hands-on training period.

A system was needed at our LSU affiliated family practice center and hospital for storage and retrieval of medical data. After considerable searching, the IBM Office System 6 was the unit selected to process the necessary data. The System 6 is a word processor which offers a wide range of filing and text processing capabilities. The System 6 consists of a keyboard, display, diskette unit, printer, and mag card unit. It can process files on patients or prepare memos to hospital personnel or patients. One of the first files incorporated into the System 6 was the family practice medical record file consisting of basic information abstracted from the patients' medical folders and then typed into the System 6. The files are stored on high density diskettes. A regular monthly and quarterly report is generated from this file and presented at the Family Practice Quarterly Meeting.

A word processor is ideal for storage and retrieval of medical data. It can be operated by a person with standard office skills and its cost of operation is not prohibitive. A very practical application of its use has been given, namely, identifying a group of patients who were taking a potentially dangerous drug.

Sanford W. Tuthill, MD
Marlin R. Welch, BA
Department of Family Medicine
Louisiana State University
School of Medicine
New Orleans, Louisiana