Background

- Interest and pressure from students and faculty for Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) resources in the library
- Administration reluctant to spend library funds purchasing resources in multiple formats; no specific funds were earmarked for PDA resources
- Library administration expressed a need to determine which products assisted students in decision making during their clinical years
- Library actively sought and received grant funding directed towards PDA use in medical education allowing Himmelfarb to develop a pilot project to evaluate PDA medical reference software

Pilot Project Objectives

- To compare PDA use among the following groups:
  – Third and Fourth year medical students
  – Second year Physician Assistant students
  – Residents
- To evaluate how groups used Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult® by Skyscape® in the clinical setting
- To use the questionnaire data to plan further PDA initiatives
Methods

- PDA Committee established to review PDA medical reference software and to plan the pilot project
- Established selection criteria for PDA medical reference software:
  - Compatible with either Palm® or personal PC operating systems
  - Ease of use and readability
  - Depth and quality of information
  - Product cost and license agreements
  - Applicability to target audience
- Applied criteria to a variety of PDA medical reference software
- After review, Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult® by Skyscape® was selected and 350 copies were purchased by Himmelfarb Library using the grant monies
- Some grant money was used to purchase PDAs and the software for librarians so that they would be familiar with the product and able to assist students
- An evaluation questionnaire was developed by the PDA Committee
- Distribution of Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®:
  - Students had to have their own PDA with an expansion card
  - Library registration was required; students provided their name, program affiliation and email address in order to receive the software
  - Students were given a product code and directions on downloading the software from the Skyscape® website
  - Students agreed to evaluate the software via a web-based questionnaire
  - Students had five to seven months to use and evaluate Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®
  - The link to the questionnaire was provided via email and feedback was received during a 2 week period in March, 2004
Results

- Of 720 potential registrants, 320 students or 44% picked up their free personal copy of *Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®* and used the product for at least five months.
- In March 2004, the questionnaire was emailed to each person and we have received 74 questionnaire responses:
  - 42 medical students
  - 17 physician assistant students
  - 15 residents
- 41 registrants had other medical software on their PDAs:
  - 8 medical students chose basic resources like dictionaries and other basic resources
  - 12 physician assistants reported having drug resources and dictionaries
  - 11 residents chose drug guides and medical calculators
  - 10 respondents did not report having other medical software on their PDAs
- 77% of those responding reported using their PDAs “all the time” regardless of group affiliation:
  - 74% used their PDA for drug information
  - 16% used their PDA for medical calculation
  - 3% used their PDA for disease etiology or epidemiology information
  - 47% used their PDA for treatment information
- Overall, 28% used *Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®* on a regular basis, of these:
  - 64% found background information on a specific condition
  - 58% enhanced their own knowledge
  - 85% felt that the software improved their work in clinical or patient situations
- 97% of all users would recommend *Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®* to others

Conclusions

- Data suggests that those already familiar with PDAs relied more heavily on them for clinical information.
- Medical and physician assistant students with limited clinical experience reported using *Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®* as a primary source; whereas, residents with greater clinical knowledge relied more heavily on other medical reference software.
- It is difficult to coax responses from students unless there is a “reward” for completing a questionnaire.
- Usage data suggests that *Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult®* is a good choice as a basic clinical information tool for students.
- When funds become available PDA software should be seriously considered for regular purchase for this user group.