Reviewer's report

**Title:** How residents and interns utilise and perceive the personal digital assistant and UpToDate

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 6 March 2008

**Reviewer:** Timothy B Patrick

**Reviewer's report:**

Major Compulsory Revisions

(1) In my original review I stated that

"A major difficulty with this manuscript is that the comparison of physician use of and preference for PDAs versus Up To Date is misleading. A PDA is a handheld computer and Up To Date is a software application that may be accessed by a PDA. The brochure found at http://www.uptodate.com/img/ppc_broch.pdf describes PDA access to Up To Date. It might be helpful to reframe the comparison as one between certain specific software applications installed on PDAs used by physicians and Up To Date which might in the particular circumstances of the comparison only be available to the physicians on desktop computers."

In response to this criticism, the authors downplayed the direct comparison between PDA use and Up To Date use, and the revised title of the paper reflects this difference. However, the revised manuscript continues to suggest a direct comparison of PDA use with Up To Date use. For example, on page 11 of the revised manuscript, the authors state that

"Considering all 134 respondents, UpToDate was used more frequently and for a longer duration than PDAs, and UpToDate was perceived to be more useful than PDAs for acquiring medical knowledge (Table 5)."

The authors emphasize as more meaningful the 23 cases in which the physician used both a PDA and Up To Date. However, with regard to each population, the authors state that

“UpToDate was … perceived to be more useful than PDAs for acquiring medical knowledge.” (p. 11)

On pages 8 and 9, the authors provide a list of software applications and knowledge sources that were available on the 54 PDAs used by physicians in this study. My understanding is that Up To Date was not installed on any of the 54 PDAs used by physicians in this study. Though the authors do not specify the distribution of the applications and knowledge sources on the 54 PDAs, it is the opinion of this reviewer that the comparison underlying this study is not one between the use of PDAs and the use of Up To Date per se, but rather is one
between the use of the applications and knowledge sources installed on the 54 PDAs, as delivered by a PDA, and the use of Up To Date, as delivered by a computer other than a PDA. The authors should clarify the nature of this underlying comparison, particularly in the 23 cases in which the physician used both a PDA and Up To Date.

Minor Essential Revisions
none

Discretionary Revisions
none

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.