

SOFTWARE REVIEWS

PDR Electronic Library, (CD-ROM), 1996. Medical Economics, 5 Paragon Dr, Montvale, NJ 07645; 1-800-737-2396, X729; \$9.95.

DOCUMENTATION. Several loose-leaf sheets of installation instructions.

HOW SUPPLIED: 1 CD-ROM.

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS: *Minimum:* PC, CD-ROM drive, DOS 3.1 with 640K main memory for DOS version. For Windows version, Windows 3.1 and 4MB memory. (No monitor specifications provided.)

MOUSE SUPPORT: Yes.

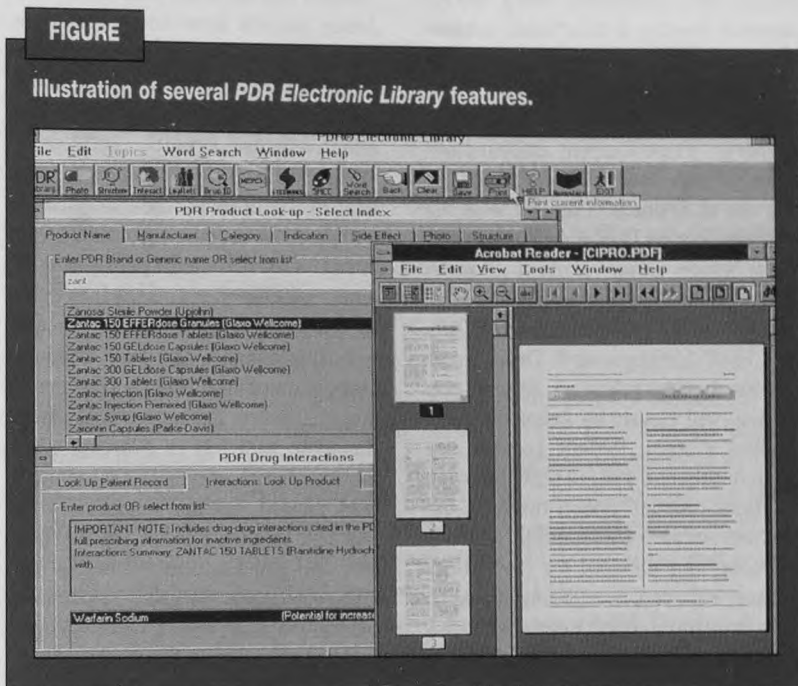
CUSTOMER SUPPORT: Toll-free.

DEMONSTRATION DISKS: Not applicable.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE: No.

RATING: Good.

CD-ROM disks hold up to 640MB of information and can be mass-produced for less than \$1 each. For these reasons, several companies are now offering low-cost CDs to users as bait for little more than production, handling, and mailing costs. For example, the American Medical Association (AMA) is offering the complete collection of its journals (JAMA, etc) for \$9.95—the 1994 journals, that is—hoping users will purchase the more recent compendia for loftier prices. Medical Economics has a slightly different spin for \$9.95: giving purchasers value and letting them try a disk full of programs for 15 days. Here is how it works: for the \$9.95, yours to keep is the CD with the full *Physicians' Desk Reference (PDR)*, *PDR for Nonprescription Drugs*, and *PDR for Ophthalmology*, which are not time-limited trial offers. Yours to try free for 15 days and then purchase if desired are *The Merck Manual* (DOS and Windows, \$99.95), *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (DOS and Windows, \$79.95), *PDR*



DrugREAX (DOS and Windows, \$129.95), *PDR Disease Management* (Windows only, \$249.95), *PDR Drug ID* (Windows only, \$39.95), and *Griffith's 5-Minute Clinical Consult* (Windows only, \$59.95). (*Stedman's Plus*, an add-in spellchecker for word processing programs, is also on the disk, but cannot be previewed before purchase. It is available for DOS and Windows for \$99.95.) Incidentally, everything on this CD appears to occupy only one half of the CD's available storage capacity. After the 15-day trial, the user calls an 800 telephone number, provides a credit card number for the purchase price of the desired module, and is given a number to enter into an on-screen form, which activates the full purchased module. Of course, there is no obligation to purchase, or even try these "extras" (but why not?).

On launching *PDR Electronic Library (Library)*, users are forced through several unnecessary screens to get to the main screen. Across the top of the main screen (Figure) is a

tool bar allowing one-click access to active modules (eg, Interactions, Leaflets, DrugID). Alternatively, users can select these modules from the File menu. The figure illustrates three modules: these have been resized (small) to all fit on one figure for illustration. The upper left window illustrates a product name lookup. "Zant" is entered, and the list scrolls to "Zantac." The user can cursor down or click on the desired selection; pressing Enter or double-clicking provides the product information. The Topics menu becomes active, and the user can select direct access to any subheading of drug information (eg, Indications, Contraindications, Dosage, How Supplied) from this menu. The content is identical to the usual desktop *PDR*.

The bottom left of the figure illustrates an Interactions search. The user selects the Interactions button (fourth from the left on the tool bar), types "Zant," and presses Enter to reproduce the window in the illustration. An interaction with warfarin is listed.

Pressing Enter or double-clicking on "warfarin" produces additional details about the Zantac-warfarin interaction. The Patient Leaflets (right portion of figure) are presented using Adobe Acrobat Reader, a functional but less than user-friendly display program. Acrobat Reader desperately needs bubble-help (illustrated in the figure in *Library*: "Print Current Information" when pointer over print icon, etc). The content of Leaflets is the same as the print version of *PDR Family Guide to Prescription Drugs Patient Leaflets*. With good equipment (60 MHz Pentium or better; 4-speed CD-ROM), the *PDR* lookups and Drug Interactions both work well and, if preloaded, will clearly be faster than any manual system. Patient Leaflets are often multipage: 4 pages for Cipro (one of about one-half dozen drugs in the preview edition), for example, which is too long and detailed for heavy-duty primary care use. In addition, access to each drug monograph needs to be simpler and quicker, like the access to drugs in the *PDR* section.

DrugID sounds great—"fast and accurate identification of virtually any tablet or capsule." Mr Jones, a

patient of a physician for whom we cover, comes to the office. He is on a green and white heart capsule, which is (of course) at home. Unfortunately, DrugID will be of no help unless Mr Jones knows how the capsule is marked, unlikely if he does not know the drug's name. With the drug name, the "imprint" on the pill is needed to effectively use DrugID. Griffith's 5-Minute Consult, a computerized version of the book by the same name, which gives capsule information on about 1000 medical problems, is worth a look.

There are a few quirks in the system. Inexplicably, the *PDR* Disease Management module is the only major feature not accessible from the main tool bar in *Library*. This module, which serves as a computerized patient summary sheet (problem list, medication list, allergy list, etc, and prescription writer) is too cumbersome to be used by primary care physicians, and appeared to me to be extremely "buggy." (Maybe it was left off the menu on purpose?) Other bugs exist: for example, displaying the product photo for Zantac Geldoe 150-mg pill shows a bottle of

liquid Zantac.

In summary, if you have good PC equipment, call the 800 number, pay your \$9.95, and take a look. You are purchasing a *PDR* (including nonprescription and ophthalmology). As a bonus, you get a chance to look at some other software for 2 weeks. *PDR DrugREAX* is a very good program for determining drug interactions and is less expensive on this CD than on diskettes (\$140 if you include the \$10 for this CD vs \$200). (*PDR DrugREAX* was reviewed separately [*J Fam Pract* 1996; 43:403]). Griffith's 5-Minute Consult is worth a look. Drug Leaflets takes too long to navigate and printouts are too long. DrugID sounded the best in theory and was the biggest disappointment. I cannot imagine a practicing family physician finding *PDR* Disease Management useful in its current incarnation. From a primary care standpoint, the variety of products found on this disk represent the full spectrum: from "get a life" to "the future is now."

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