
Clinical Pharmacology is an electronic drug reference database designed to provide fast and easy access in the clinical setting to extensive information on drugs currently in use in the United States. The database contains full monographs describing 575 of the most commonly prescribed drugs and several thousand "mini-monographs" on less common drugs, combination preparations, and new drugs.

Without appearing overly complex, Clinical Pharmacology offers a variety of features. In some ways, Gold Standard Multimedia appears to be attempting to provide a reference tool, a clinical information system, and a teaching tool in one product. The product succeeds as a powerful reference tool that allows clinicians to zero in on the key information that they seek at that moment.

Clinical Pharmacology employs a point-and-click interface, which makes it easy to open additional windows of information as needed. The database is extensively indexed and cross-referenced. In addition to the Main Index of 575 drug monographs, other indexes are Contraindications, Drug Interaction, Product ID, Costs, and New Drugs. The user can specify which index to search or search them all. It is possible to generate lists of drugs that are indexed on the same term, such as a contraindication or a major adverse reaction. The Product ID feature enables the user to identify a drug by building a description of its indexed features, such as shape, color, or others. The drugs with full monographs also include Patient Information screens, which are designed to be printed out and given to the patient.

In addition to providing a strong reference tool, Clinical Pharmacology can be used to build a patient database and to generate prescriptions. To support this feature, Gold Standard has included a configuration feature that enables the user to specify varying levels of access through log-in IDs. The Patient Record is created using standardized terms from the existing indexes, which enables the program to check for contraindications on a particular patient. The patient database would only be appropriate in a small private practice where patient records could be archived on a microcomputer or local-area network server.

Clinical Pharmacology also has the ability to automatically generate quizzes. The user can specify the number of questions and their scope and depth. This feature will probably go underutilized in the clinical setting for which the program was designed.

The program is easy to install and not difficult to use. However, as someone who is familiar with certain conventions, I found the icons to be confusing. The “Find” icon is a magnifying glass, which I am used to interpreting as “zoom.” There are different arrow icons that move to the next index and to the next cross-reference, which can be confusing. In addition, depending on where you are in the database, the bullet and the arrow before a word mean something different. Despite these hurdles, it did not take long to get used to the interface. The Program Map is extremely useful. Users can always return to it to see the structure of the database and to get their bearings before continuing. The balloon help also proved well-written and very helpful.

It is difficult to fully evaluate Clinical Pharmacology without doing a lengthy analysis of the content, its reliability, and its completeness. The database covers drugs used in the United States only (although a spot check revealed that RU-486 is included in the database). As far as it was possible to evaluate the content of the database, it appeared to be up to date. Each record has a date attached to it. Records in the New Drugs index were dated as late as September 4, 1994; I received the software in mid-November 1994.

I compared the Clinical Pharmacology entry for clomiphene citrate with the information found in the American Hospital Formulary Service Drug Information and the 1994 Physicians GenRx. All three sources covered similar information, and I did not find any contradictory information. This comparison demonstrated very clearly the editorial philosophy of Clinical Pharmacology to condense the important clinical information so that it can be quickly digested by the health care provider. The editors are selective about what they include in the monographs. In some cases, more complete information may be available in the print sources; however, the additional features of Product ID and multiple indexing make this a worthwhile clinical source.

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