
New Media



[1] Web Site Review

A Critical Review of the Siemens KION Anesthesia Workstation <http://www.oyston.com/kion/>

This very interesting Web site by Dr. John Oyston is a “consumer’s report” style review of the Siemens KION Anesthesia Workstation. Product reviews of this kind are woefully lacking in the print anesthesia literature yet are crucial to clinicians looking for the best purchase for their department. Consequently, this site provides a particularly valuable service that regular anesthesia journals have consistently ignored.

Dr. Oyston indicates that the mission of the site “is to critically review the usability of the KION anesthesia workstation, and to educate users about some potential difficulties and how to work around them” and notes that “potential purchasers of the machine should consider whether the issues raised are of importance to them, and discuss the current status of upgrades with their Siemens representative.” Thus, the site has an implicit goal of encouraging (or forcing) the manufacturer to deal with some of the difficulties raised in the review.

The bulk of the design problems that Oyston cites are human factors issues. Numerous design problems are nicely illustrated with colour photographs and some “Quick Visual Quiz” sidebars that very effectively make their point.

The original release of this Web site was met with hostility in some circles (especially when it was suspected that rival manufacturers were using the page as “negative advertising”) and so the page was temporarily suspended to ensure that all objections were dealt with. In fact, Siemens provided 17 pages of written material in response to the original Web site, which Oyston used as further source material for the current revision.

This effort represents an important new means to communicate information to anesthesiologists dealing with anesthesia equipment. There is a critical need for other machines to be similarly reviewed. Still, not every-

one will be happy with Oyston’s comments. Perhaps this is why Dr. Oyston has placed the following (unenforceable) restriction on his page: “Manufacturers of rival products are specifically prohibited from using this information as “negative advertising”.

Anyone interested in anesthesia machine design and human factor issues in medical equipment will find this Web site to be quite useful. I have recommended it privately to several regulatory officials as a starting template for reviewing other anesthesia machines.

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[2] Word Processing on the Palm Handheld Computer

One of the initial shortcomings of handheld computers was the inability to manage large text documents with only the built-in Memo application. However, there are now a number of much more sophisticated word processing programs for handheld computers using the Palm® operating system (Palm OS), including AportisDoc™ (www.aportis.com), Quickword™ (formerly SmartDoc; www.tapworks.com), and TealDoc™ (www.tealpoint.com), that produce files in the “doc” format. The Palm OS doc format is not the same as that used in a Microsoft Word “.doc” file, but it does provide a way to create and edit long documents on the handheld, with some minor formatting. These documents can be uploaded as text files to your desktop computer, where they open easily in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect (there is an initial line or two of gibberish that has to be deleted). Newer versions of some of these programs have increasing degrees of compatibility with Microsoft Word, and they are all also compatible with the various full-sized keyboards available for the Palm, including GoType!™ (www.landware.com) and the Palm keyboard itself.

To reverse the process, a plain text file on your desktop can be converted to "doc" format with MakeDocDD for the Macintosh, or MakeDocW for Windows, and uploaded to your handheld, but complex formatting is lost. Both of these free programs can be found at www.aportis.com/resources/AportisDoc/makedocutilities.html. You can even convert whole novels or e-texts to doc format and take them with you wherever you go.

Documents-To-Go by DataViz (www.dataviz.com) fulfils a different purpose. In its initial presentation, it allowed you to take any Microsoft Word or Excel document and transfer it to your Palm Os handheld with most of the formatting intact. Any changes made in the source file on the desktop are automatically transferred to the handheld version at the next Hotsync, allowing you to carry current versions of reference lists, manuals, checklists and guidelines, drug conversion tables, and so on. However, it was not possible to edit the document on the handheld. With the latest release of Documents To Go, editing can be done on the handheld, with synchronization in both directions. Changes made in the handheld version of the document are transferred to the desktop version. Documents To Go will manage Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, Word Pro, Excel, Lotus 1-2-3, Quattro Pro, and text documents on Windows machines, and Word, Appleworks, Excel, and text documents on Macintosh computers.

A useful addition to the new version is an add-on called PDF To Go™, which will convert an Adobe Acrobat document (a "pdf" file) to a format that can be viewed on the handheld. Images are not transferred, but all the text and tables can be seen. PDF files cannot be edited on the handheld. Many participants at the 2001 CAS Annual Meeting were surprised to receive the abstracts and refresher course manuscripts on a CD-ROM disk. However, I found it relatively simple to select the abstracts and refresher courses I was interested in and transfer them to my Palm handheld computer with PDF To Go, which made them easily accessible during the meeting. Aportis also has a PDF reader, but it is currently limited to Windows-based desktop computers.

Handheld computers have become increasingly sophisticated and valuable, while retaining in most cases the elegant simplicity of design and programming necessary for quick and easy function.

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