



285 days and counting . . .

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As I wrote this, the ticking Y2K clock run by the Student Connection Program at Industry Canada read 285 days, 10 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds. It did produce the desired sense of urgency, but do doctors really have anything to worry about? Lots of Web sites will tell you if you do, and one will even provide student consultants to assess the Y2K risks faced by your computers.

The challenge for physicians is to find out where their problems may lie, and Health Canada has been doing a good job simplifying this task. Since March 1998, Denis Roy of the Therapeutic Products Program has been contacting the manufacturers of medical devices and trying to identify possible Y2K problems.

"This problem is potentially inherent in anything that's got a date function in it," he explained. "It's a potentially huge problem for health care because so many devices are being used."

Roy and his team sent letters to all manufacturers and sales agents, asking them to confirm whether their devices are Y2K compliant. The responses that have trickled in are available at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb-dgps/therapeut/htmleng/y2k_md.html.

Here physicians can determine if their favourite infusion pump or powered ventilator will still be working come Jan. 1, 2000. And they can do it quickly and easily, and right online, instead of having to approach each manufacturer themselves.

"I can tell you that all manufacturers are completely overwhelmed with calls these days," said Roy. "We're trying to make it easier for everyone by maintaining this central database."

The site reports all information received by Health Canada and even lets

users read the original correspondence. Roy stressed, and the site reiterates, that Health Canada is not testing the claims made by manufacturers, but is merely passing on the information.

"Any compliance status given to either a company or a product is based on the information provided by that company," visitors are warned. "As companies proceed with testing, some of their results and information may change. Health Canada will continue to update this information and users are therefore encouraged to check the information regularly."

The site also contains a long list of companies that have not responded to requests for information about Y2K compliance. This list includes more than

80 companies in Canada, the US, Japan and elsewhere.

Not all the calls Roy receives are from physicians. He also hears from patients worried about implanted pacemakers. On this front the news is good: no problems have been found with any of these devices. However, he still encourages physicians to keep an eye on the growing Health Canada database.

Another excellent source of compliance information can be found at the Canadian Year 2000 National Clearinghouse for Health (CYNCH) (www.cynch.org/). This indexed site combines the databases of Alberta Wellnet, the Quebec Ministry of Health, the Health Canada Therapeutic Products Division and Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Viewers are taken on a user-friendly, step-by-step trip through mountains of information. Data are available on Y2K

compliance, risk management, contingency planning, supply-chain management and other key issues.

If you are just getting started, Roy suggests that you first look at all possible devices with electronic controls. Search through the Health Canada database or the CYNCH site to see if there is a note about it, and then replace or update it as needed.

"For most physicians the issues are pretty much the same as any business," he said. "Take a good look at the hardware and software you are running, and then decide what needs updating or replacing."

If you are still feeling overwhelmed with all this, click over to the SOS-2000 site maintained by Industry Canada (<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/SSG/yk04743e.html>). This has several general documents and useful links, and includes a list of Y2K consultants, upcoming conferences and workshops, and the latest on federal government preparedness.

Finally, there is the Canadian Federal Government Year 2000 Information Site (www.info2000.gc.ca/). This provides information on Ottawa's tax relief and loan programs designed to help small businesses cope with the Y2K problem.

There is also a government-sponsored consulting service run by university and college students, which is willing to assess the Y2K readiness of your office computers. For \$195, the Student Connection Program (www.scp-ebb.com/ehome.htm) will provide a 1-day assessment of software and hardware on up to 10 personal computers; each additional computer costs \$15.

The students will review your computer-related Y2K risks and provide a detailed report and action plan. "The program will not completely solve all of your Year 2000 issues, but it will get you one step closer to Y2K readiness."

