

# Getting a handle on Palm OS

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**H**and-held computers using the Palm Operating System (OS) are a good choice for physicians who want an economical, easy-to-use device.

Right now, there is Version 4.1. Version 5.0 of the Palm OS will be released in late October, 2002. See Table 2 for a list of Palm-related Web sites.

## Basic Software

The **Calendar** tracks dates and appointments while the **Alarm** reminds you about important events.

The **Address Book** keeps track of names, addresses and phone numbers. Instead of carrying business cards, you can “beam” your information to another handheld, using the built-in infrared port.

The **Memo Pad** stores text information. The **Calculator** is handy for calculating pediatric drug doses. Some newer models include “Documents to Go,” a program for reading Microsoft Word documents and Excel spreadsheets.

## Medical Software

The most popular medical programs are drug databases (see the August 2002 InforMed for more details), quick references (*i.e.*, “The Five-Minute Clinical Consult”) and medical calculators. The Medical Information Services (MIS) Web site describes selected software products in more detail.

## Display

Try several different display models to determine what works best for you. A monochrome (black & white) is adequate for many medical applications. Better monochrome models have a 320 x 320 screen resolution. Color displays are brighter, but require more power, resulting in a shorter battery life. The best color display is “16-bit,” displaying 64,000 colors.

## Processor

The central processor is the computer’s brain. Most models use a 33-megahertz processor, but a few Sony models now have a 66-megahertz processor chip.

Table 1

### Selected models

These models are “workhorse” models, not “entry level” or “specialty” models, such as those combining a computer with a cell phone.

#### **Palm Computers**

[www.palm.com](http://www.palm.com)  
M125: mono, 8 mb  
M500: mono, 8 mb  
M130: color, 8 mb  
M515: color, 16 mb

#### **Handspring**

[www.handspring.com](http://www.handspring.com)  
The Visor models use a proprietary expansion slot. Several medical textbooks are available pre-loaded on Handspring modules.  
Neo: mono, 8 mb (older)  
Pro: mono, 16 mb (older)

#### **Treo model**

The Treo model has a thumb-operated mini-keyboard and a Secure Digital expansion slot.  
Treo 90: color (only 12 bit), 8 mb

#### **HandEra**

[www.handera.com](http://www.handera.com)  
[www.handheldinterfaces.com](http://www.handheldinterfaces.com)  
The HandEra includes a voice recorder and uses both Secure Digital and Compact Flash memory cards. Handheld Interfaces is a Canadian vendor.  
HandEra 330: mono, 16 mb

#### **Sony**

[www.sonystyle.ca](http://www.sonystyle.ca)  
Sony computers use Memory Stick expansion cards that can be shared with other Sony devices.  
Clié S360: mono, 16 mb  
Clié T615C: color, 16 mb

## Memory & Expansion Cards

Several models now have 16 megabytes (MB) of random access memory (RAM). The most common memory expansion card is the “Secure Digital” type. Data can be stored on the card, but must usually be moved into RAM to be displayed, possibly slowing down some applications.

## Sales & Service

Due to competition and the introduction of new models, several manufacturers have dropped the prices on older models making them cost-effective.


If possible, visit a vendor who sells several different brands and models, so you can compare features. Before you purchase, ask about the warranty and service policies. 



Table 2

### Palm-related Web sites

**Dalhousie University - Medicine**

[www.medicine.dal.ca/palm/](http://www.medicine.dal.ca/palm/)  
Includes an extensive software list and a comparison of Palm OS and Pocket PC computers.

**Dr. Jim Thompson**

[www.jimthompson.net/palmpda/](http://www.jimthompson.net/palmpda/)  
Jim is a PEI emergency physician who reviews the medical use of Palm OS handhelds.

**MD Management (CMA)**

<http://mdm.ca>  
To locate two recent articles by Dr. Jay Mercer, enter “pda” into the Web site’s search engine.

**FP-Handheld**

[www.fphandheld.com](http://www.fphandheld.com)  
A good list of Palm OS software.

**Palm Boulevard**

[www.palmblvd.com](http://www.palmblvd.com)  
Hardware and software reviews.

**Palm Gear**

[www.palmgear.com](http://www.palmgear.com)  
Hardware and software reviews.

**PalmPilot.org**

[palmpilot.org](http://palmpilot.org)  
Hardware and software reviews.

**Medical Information Service**

[www.ruralnet.ab.ca/medinfo/](http://www.ruralnet.ab.ca/medinfo/)  
Our hand-held page has links to the Web sites listed in this article and many more. It contains additional information about hand-helds and medical software.