This is our first review of a dedicated medical office management system, meaning one that is specifically intended to be run on one brand of computer. In this case, the machine is the Texas Instruments professional computer.

A dedicated system has the advantage of simpler and more specific instructions, but of course you are limited to the one kind of machine. In this case, fortunately, the machine is a good one.

I am quite impressed with this computer. Although I have not as yet studied the operating system in detail, I find the keyboard the best laid out and easiest to use I have encountered, and way ahead of the standard IBM layout. The color monitor is readable and attractive; the program makes optimum use of special features like inverse video, color highlighting, and insert/delete capability. The printer, with a standard dot-matrix 12" carriage, is super. You can switch-select any of three pitches and two line spacings while still on line, and you do not have to go off line to form-feed either, as in most printers I have seen.

The computer comes with a built-in hard disk, plus the standard 5½" floppy disk drive. It is not strictly portable, but quite light in weight. The keyboard is very well laid out, with a separate keypad and a cluster of arrow keys for cursor control. The function keys are across the top of the keyboard, and the shift keys are in the right place (unlike the IBM). The key action is positive, and has a good tactile feedback response.

The color monitor which comes with the set has good resolution (for characters, at least) and is pleasing to the eye. The program makes use of three of the colors: magenta, blue, and white.

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Dr. Cushing is a practicing physician full time in solo private practice in Andover, Massachusetts. His interest in computers began as a hobby in 1978 with a Heathkit front panel 6502 programmer and has extended through seven computer models including all the Radio Shacks, the CompuPro 8/16 and a Corona Data Systems PC.

Dr. Cushing has familiarized himself with (though hardly claims to be an expert in) all of the most common operating systems, as well as the languages Basic, Assembler, Forth, MUMPS, C, PASCAL and LISP.

His other hobbies include amateur radio, music and sailing. He is currently Chief of the Department of Medicine at Lawrence General Hospital, Lawrence, Mass.
I found the program easy to set up using the easel-type instruction book; the documentation was elegantly printed, with a minimum of typos and white space. To go, you connect the keyboard to the computer, then plug in the line cord and the printer cable, as well as the monitor cable, and you are set up. The program comes on three floppy disks which contain all the operating system you will need, the main program, and some demo data files.

You copy the three disks onto the hard disk, and answer some simple queries about the names of the disks ("a:" for the floppy and "e:" for the hard disk). You are then ready to set up the data files.

I noticed that although I had specified the hard disk for all the files, the program frequently searched the (empty) floppy drive for files, wasting time. This bug has been corrected, according to the publisher.

PROGRAM SETUP
The manual recommends that you practice using the demo files first, and that is good advice. You need to become familiar with using the support files, such as diagnosis and service codes, insurance company names, etc. The documentation walks you through sample data entry dialogue, and shows you how to insert and delete letters, return to a previously entered field (line) for editing, and save the data when ready.

You set up the practice and doctor files, following a menu. The doctor information screen allows only one ID number for insurance, and no employer ID number, but allows room for "user-defined fields" for these data.

Once you have practiced enough, you delete the demo files and begin to set up for your own practice. You type in all the data for your office and the doctors who will be billing, all the procedures you will be doing, and the drugs you will prescribe.

There is a problem with the procedure code file; it doesn't allow you to translate the code printed out on insurance forms to conform to the claims center's own code lists. In our area, the Blues, Medicare, Welfare, and private insurers all use different procedure codes. This is a major deficiency of this program, and all you can do until it is repaired is to write in the correct code by hand on each form, or create a separate set of "in-house codes" for the various insurance companies' procedure codes.

Since ICD/CM codes are hard to memorize, it would be very convenient if you could devise your own simple code ("BP" for hypertension, for example) and have the program translate it into ICD code for you. With this system, you couldn't do that.

PATIENT DATA ENTRY
All data entry is screen-oriented, meaning that you enter data a whole screenful at a time, and may go back over previous lines, using the arrow keys to move around the screen. You may change a single letter without rewriting a whole line, and may insert or delete characters from the middle of a word, using two function keys. Incidentally, the program comes with a template which fits over the keyboard and shows you what all the function keys mean. This is a very nice touch.

When you have checked all the data for accuracy, you then press the key marked "do", and the data are saved. The fields allowed are the usual name, address, and phone number, the birthdate and SS number, the name of the responsible party (who pays the bill) and his relation to the patient, the primary and secondary insurance carriers' codes and ID numbers, and free text (three lines).

The account numbers all begin with the doctor ID code for the MD who is in charge of the case. This code usually consists of the doctor's first and last initials. You are given the option of letting the program assign the five-digit numerical tail, or you may assign it yourself. This is a good idea, since you may wish to reassign an old number, rather than add a new one. In patient data entry there are three default values: date of account opening, which defaults to today, and patient's city and state (but not the zip code), which default to the city and state of the practice.

PROCEDURE ENTRY
This too is screen-oriented, and here also you may change data as much as necessary for correctness before saving data. For each related series of procedures, such as hospital visits or office visits for