

Recall and Reminder Systems

A Guide for Staff in General Practice

INTRODUCTION

What are Recalls and Reminders and what are they used for

The terms 'recall' and 'reminder' are terms sometimes used interchangeably. 'Recall' may be used more in relation to following up abnormal test results whereas 'reminder' is used in relation to regular visits for preventive care.

A recall system is different to a reminder system in that reminders are used as preventative activities and do not necessarily have to be followed up if the patient does not attend the practice. If a recall system is being used to recall patients back to the surgery for abnormal results then the patient must be followed through until they attend an appointment with the doctor.

It is recommended that only patients who normally attend the practice should receive reminder notices.

Reminders and Recalls can be used for:

Recalls and reminders can be used to remind patients about screening, preventative care activities, and ongoing management of conditions, including:

- Immunisations
- Diabetes management
- Asthma management
- CVD management (e.g. BP, lipids, weight)
- Enhanced Primary Care items
- 3 Step Mental Health process
- Cervical Screening
- Colorectal screening
- Bone density testing
- Blood pressure checks
- Skin Checks
- Home Medicines Review

How many recalls should be sent?

Firstly, send a reminder/recall letter to the patient (a phone call is an alternative) that a regular visit is due e.g. for a diabetes review or pap test. If no response is received within the given time e.g. one month, attempt to contact the patient by phone^{1,2}. It is further suggested that three attempts be made to phone the patient at different times of the day¹.

If attempts to contact the patient have been unsuccessful and there are abnormal test results a registered post letter should be sent to the last known address^{1,2}.

It is important to document all attempts to recall a patient.

Patient Consent

Patients do not have to give explicit consent to their health information being used in a GP surgery for the purposes of recall and reminders so long as that information is only used by the practice for that purpose.⁴

It is recommended, however, that patients are informed of the availability of the recall and reminder

system and given the opportunity not to be involved if they do not wish. One way in which this can be done is to display a sign in the waiting room and put information in the Practice Information Sheet which advises patients of the use of a recall and reminder system within the practice and the practice's policy to enrol patients in the system unless they advise otherwise.

The doctor/practice should ensure that the patient is aware of and agrees to the method of recall/reminder. That is, whether it is in order for a phone call to be made and a message left with the person who answers the phone, or a recorded message, or whether the reminder should be by way of letter only. Otherwise, an unlawful disclosure might inadvertently be made.

Do you need explicit consent from patients to allow practice staff to generate recall letters and phone patients for recall? ²

No, implied consent is adequate. Explicit patient consent is not needed as GPs and practice staff are bound by the same code of ethics and legislation.

In accordance with privacy legislation practices should ask staff to sign confidentiality agreements and display the practice privacy policy for patients to read.

Some points to consider when planning for your recall and reminder system

- Decide on which clinical areas the practice will use recalls and reminders for.
- Define the responsibility of the doctors or Practice Nurse to enter/update/action recalls and reminders in the patients notes and/or in the recall system.
- Whose responsibility will it be to regularly produce recall lists and send out recall and reminder notices to patients (eg. practice staff/ practice nurse).
- How often will the recall list be generated (e.g. first/last day of the month).
- What type of recall and reminder notices will the practice use (e.g. letter and/or phone call).
- What is the procedure for checking that patients have responded to their recall notices.
- What is the procedure for following-up patients that have not responded a recall notice.

References

1. Central Sydney Division of General Practice – Practice Support Program (2003) Recall and Reminder Systems.
2. Danielle Penn, (2002) Register and Recall Systems, Centre for GP Integration Studies, UNSW, (source Dr Craig Lillenthal, Bowral GP medico-legal advisor and columnist for Australian Doctor, and Dr Sara Bird, Medico legal advisor to Medical Defence Australia)
3. J. Kelly & P. Schattner (2001) Setting Up Computerised Patient Reminder Systems, Monash Division of General Practice.
4. Alliance of NSW Divisions (2001) Division's Guide to the National Privacy Principles.

MANUAL RECALL & REMINDER SYSTEMS

CARD FILE SYSTEM

A simple card file system with each month on it can be used for reminders. Write the patients' name on the card for the month when the recall is due along with the recall reason. Each month check the card for the list of recalls & reminders due that month and send reminders out to these patients. You can then mark each patient off as they attend the surgery for that recall or reminder.

Example: A patient comes in for the flu vaccination in April ask them if they would like a reminder for next year, if so write their name on the card for April next year. Come April next year you will have a list of patients to send reminders to.⁶

BOOK REGISTER SYSTEM

A book may be kept for recalling patients for both abnormal results and preventative activities.

Each time the Doctor indicates a need for recalling the patient, details of the recall can be recorded into a book, and should include:⁷

- Patient's name, Date of Birth and chart number
- Patient's contact details including phone numbers
- Reason for recall
- Date of recall and how it was done eg. Letter / phone call
- Follow up recall if necessary
- Date patient attended the consultation for the recall
- Any other system used if unable to contact patient eg. Registered mail

FLAGGING A PATIENTS' FILE

You can flag a patient's file with a coloured sticker or some form of coding to remind the doctor when he/she opens the patient's file that a reminder is due for on a certain date for a particular condition.

Note: this method only allows for opportunistic reminders when the patient actually presents to the surgery and is recommended to be used in conjunction with and compliment other reminder systems.

References

5. Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (2003) AGPAL Registry of Resources: Reminder Systems, http://www.gip.com.au/ror/files/173_1.6.4_Reminder_systems.doc [24 February 2004].
7. Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (2003) AGPAL Registry of Resources: Reminder Systems, http://www.gip.com.au/ror/files/66_Recall_systems.doc [24 February 2004].

RECALL & REMINDER USING MEDICAL DIRECTOR

The recall and reminder system in Medical Director is designed to operate in the following manner:

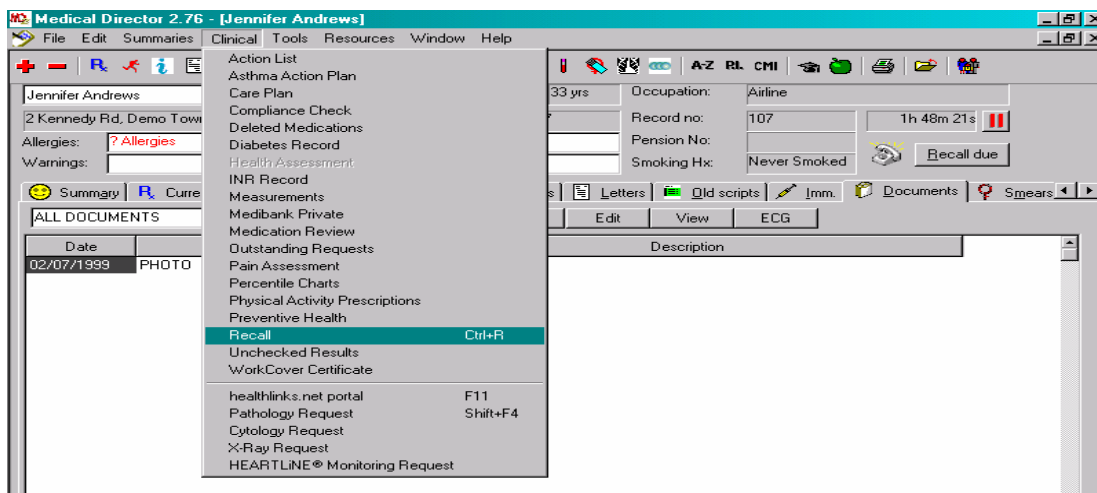
- ◆ The GP or Practice Staff defines the recall(s) for a patient;
- ◆ During a consultation the GP is alerted in the patient's file (by an animated telephone) if a patient has a recall due within 30 days or overdue;
- ◆ Practice staff regularly generate a patient recall list (e.g. beginning of each month);
- ◆ Patients on the list are notified of due recalls by either printing the list and manually contacting patients or by performing a mail merge from the generated list (this is recorded in patient notes automatically);
- ◆ All patients notified can automatically have their 'regular recalls' updated and 'once only recalls' removed from the system;
- ◆ The Actions Database holds a record of all outstanding actions for the patients (this includes recalls);
- ◆ During a consultation the doctor is prompted with a list of outstanding actions for the patient.

Adding Patient Recalls

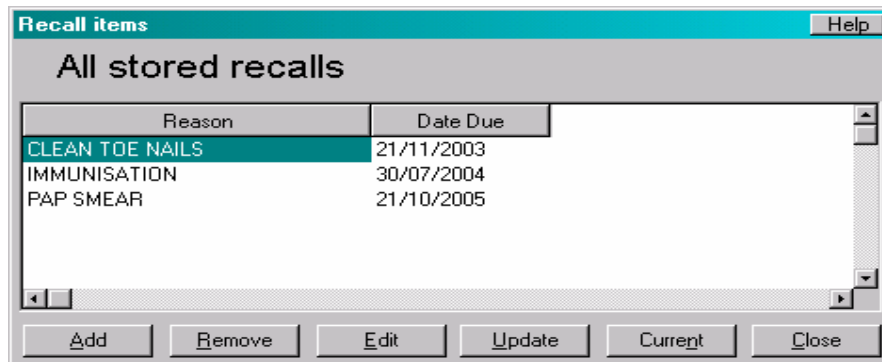
There are several ways to add recall items to a patient's record. The most common and direct approach is to add recalls via the patient recall window.

While in the patient record:

- Select **Clinical**
- Scroll down to **Recall** and click, as shown below. You can also use the shortcut: **CTRL-R**.



The *Recall items* window opens which displays all the currently stored recalls:



You have the option to:

- **Add** to make an additional reason to recall the patient
- **Remove** the reason for the patient recall
- **Edit** to change the date due for a recall
- **Update** the update button is used to add the original time interval to the current date and update the recall due date
- **Current** will display all recalls due in the next 30 days

To add a Recall to a Patient's File:

- Click on the **Add** button.

The *Add Recall* window opens, which displays a list of the standard recalls protocols.

The screenshot shows the 'Add Recall' dialog box. At the top, there is a 'Doctor' dropdown menu with 'DR. A. PRACTITIONER' selected. Below this is a 'Reason for recall' text box and a 'Save Protocol' button. A list of recall protocols is displayed: BLOOD PRESSURE REVIEW, BREAST EXAMINATION, CHOLESTEROL REVIEW, DIABETES REVIEW, DVA REVIEW, FULL MEDICAL CHECK-UP, IMMUNISATION, and INFLUENZA VACCINATION. To the right of the list is an 'Interval' section with a text box containing '1' and three radio buttons: 'Weeks' (selected), 'Months', and 'Years'. Below the interval section is a 'Recall Date' text box with '06/02/2004' and a checkbox for 'Once only recall' which is unchecked. At the bottom are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons.

- Select the **Reason for Recall** by clicking on a recall protocol: this will automatically select the standard interval of time for that recall.

You can also enter your own *Reason for Recall* by typing it into the text box, then setting the desired time interval, then press **Save Protocol**. The new protocol is added to the list.

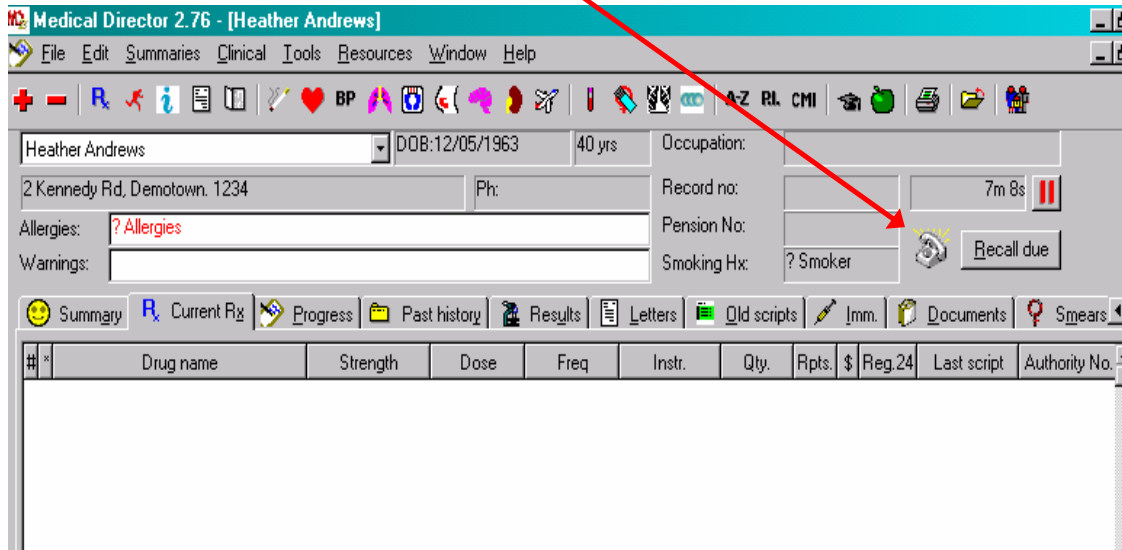
You can also *modify an existing protocol* in the same manner by selecting the protocol from the list, changing the desired time interval and selecting 'Save Protocol'. This will overwrite the existing protocol though does not affect the recall interval of patients already saved with that protocol.

You can *delete a protocol* by selecting the protocol from the list and pressing the delete key on the keyboard.

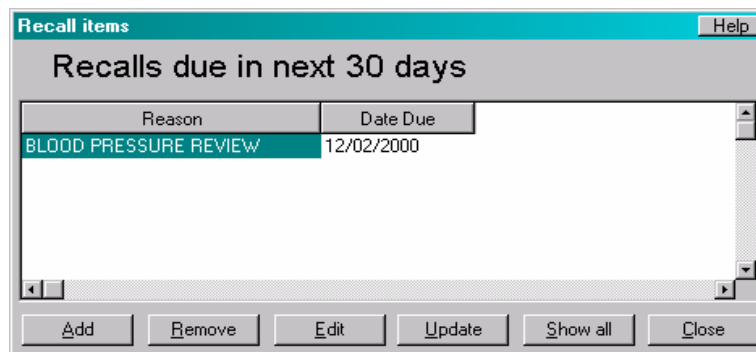
- Select/modify **Interval** period e.g. number of weeks, months or years if you want it to differ from the default interval period shown.
- The **Recall Date** is automatically calculated from the recall interval previously entered. This field can also be manually changed to a particular date of your choice.
- If it is a one-off recall mark **Once only recall**. This will mean that the recall cannot be 'updated' using the 'update button' and the recall will be deleted after printing the recall list or performing a mail merge.
- Once you have completed all the fields click **Save**.

Managing Patient Recalls during Consultation

When a patient's record is opened, if there are recalls due within the next 30 days a visual alert in the form of a animated telephone is displayed



- Click the Recall button (to the right of the animation) and the following window is displayed.



This is virtually the same window as displayed when adding recalls except that it only lists recalls that are due. From here you can Add (refer to previous topic), Remove and Update recalls.

Updating the Recall during the consultation

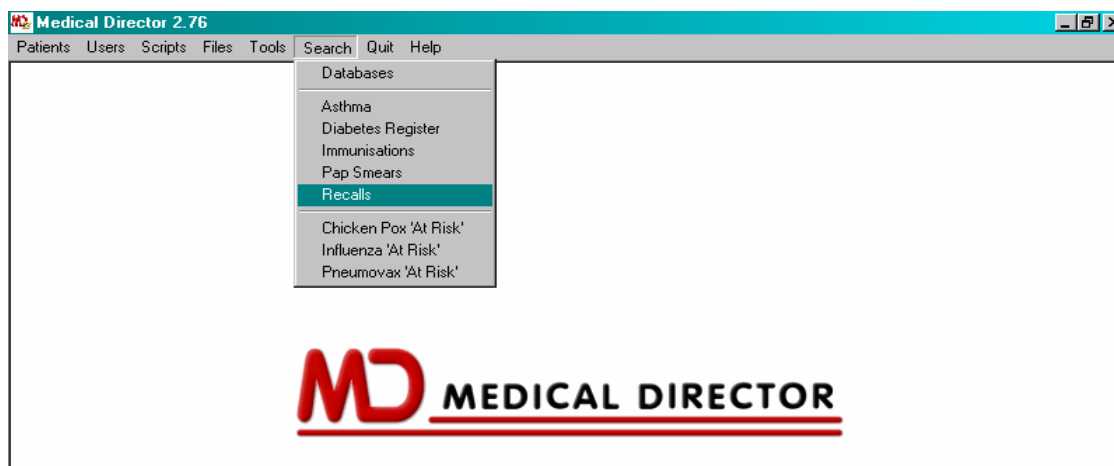
- Click the **Update** button for the appropriate recall item. If the recall is a 'regular recall' item (not 'once only'), the original Interval is added to the current date and the recall date updated.



Recalling Patients and Generating Recall Lists

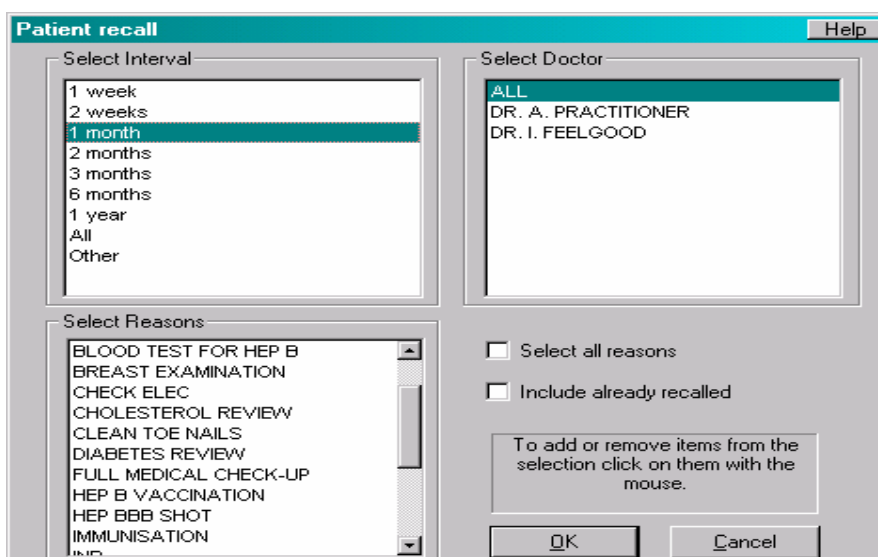
Patient recall lists can be used to identify and notify patients who are due or will be due for recall within a specified period of time. Creating a list of patients who are due for recall takes place from the main menu:

- Select **Search**
- Scroll down to **Recalls** and click, as shown below:



The 'recall list' screen opens and the 'Patient recall' window appears:

- **Select Interval** - patients who are due for recall within the next number of weeks or months. By selecting 'All' you will get all recalls that have been set or by selecting 'Other' you can enter a start and end date
- **Select Doctor**
- **Select Reasons** for recall – you select one, multiple or all reasons for recall
- To select all reasons by tick the box marked 'Select all reasons'
- You can also include patients who have already been recalled by ticking the box 'Include already recalled'
- Once you have completed all the fields click **OK**.



The patient recall list will then be displayed. This list also includes patients with overdue recalls.

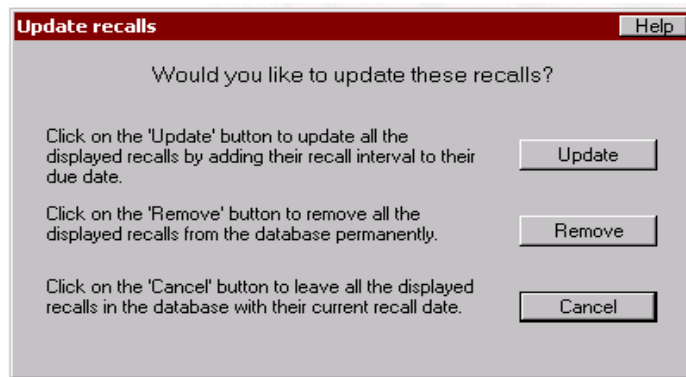
The recall list includes the following information for each patient: Surname, First Name, reason, Recall Date, Doctor, Address, DOB, Sex, Phone, Business Phone, Medicare No., Pension No. and Chart No.

Surname	First name	Reason	Recall date	Doctor	Address
Anderson	David	Blood Pressure Review	06/02/2004		61 Wallace St, Melbourne 3000
Andrews	John	Full Medical Check-Up	14/12/1999		2 Kennedy Rd, Demo Town 452
Andrews	John	Diabetes Review	24/07/2000		2 Kennedy Rd, Demo Town 452
Andrews	John	Weight Review	03/02/2001		2 Kennedy Rd, Demo Town 452
Andrews	John	Cholesterol Review	24/07/2001		2 Kennedy Rd, Demo Town 452
Andrews	Maureen	Blood Pressure Review	20/08/1999		3 Best St, St. Kilda 3107
Andrews	Sally	Immunisation	07/12/1999		21 Best St, Pill Land 3123
Smith	Joanne	Immunisation	02/01/2004	DR. A. PRACTITIONER	21 Orange St, Wollongong 2500
Wagtail	Willy	Blood Test	28/12/1999		The Eucalyplus Tree, Sherwood
Wagtail	Willy	Pap Smear	22/03/2000		The Eucalyplus Tree, Sherwood

From this list several tasks can be performed and are indicated by the buttons at the bottom of the screen:

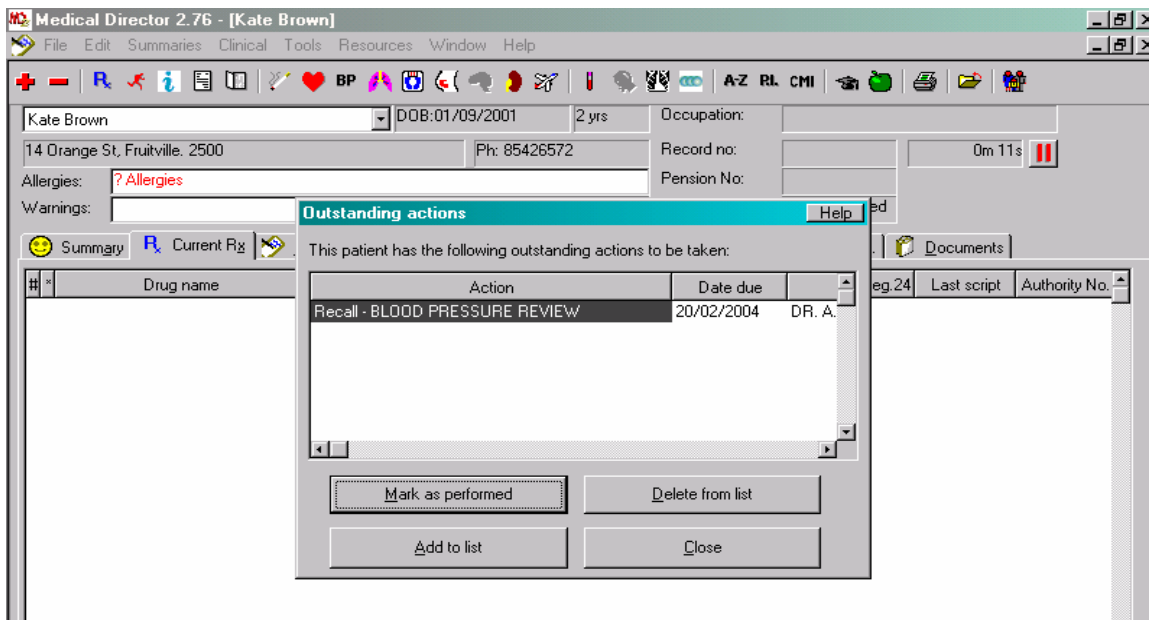
- **Open:** opens the patient record of a highlighted patient
- **Save:** allows you to save the file as a database file for viewing/editing within another program
- **Print:** prints the entire list of patients generated
- **Labels:** allows you to print address labels for the patients on the list
- **Mail Merge:** allows you to perform a mail merge using a recall letter template within Medical Director (*refer to next section*)
- You can also delete names from the list before printing. Highlight the particular patient you wish to delete and press **'delete'** on the keyboard. A box will appear asking you "Do you want to remove this entry from the master recall list), as well as from the current list for printing?" By selecting **Yes** you are able to remove the patient from the recall database permanently as well as the current list on the screen. By clicking **No** you will just remove it from the current list but the patient's name will reappear next time you generate the recall list.

When you **Print, Save, Print labels** or **Mail merge** the list, you are prompted with the following window:



If you click on **Update** this will update any ongoing recalls by the set interval and delete any “once only” recalls. The recall reason will then have been added to the **Actions database**. (For this to occur make sure there is a tick in the **Add recalls to actions list** box - normally is selected by default).

When the patient returns to see you an **Outstanding Actions** prompt should appear when you open their record, alerting you that there is a recall due.



Because the recalls are being added to the action list, the patient recalls can be “Updated” to prevent patients being sent multiple recall letters. Patients who have not responded to their recall can then be quickly identified through the Outstanding Action List:

Important note 1: The Update or Remove buttons should only be used if the outstanding action feature is fully enabled, as pressing *update* or *remove* will mean that recall will no longer appear as due or overdue and can only be monitored via the outstanding actions function.

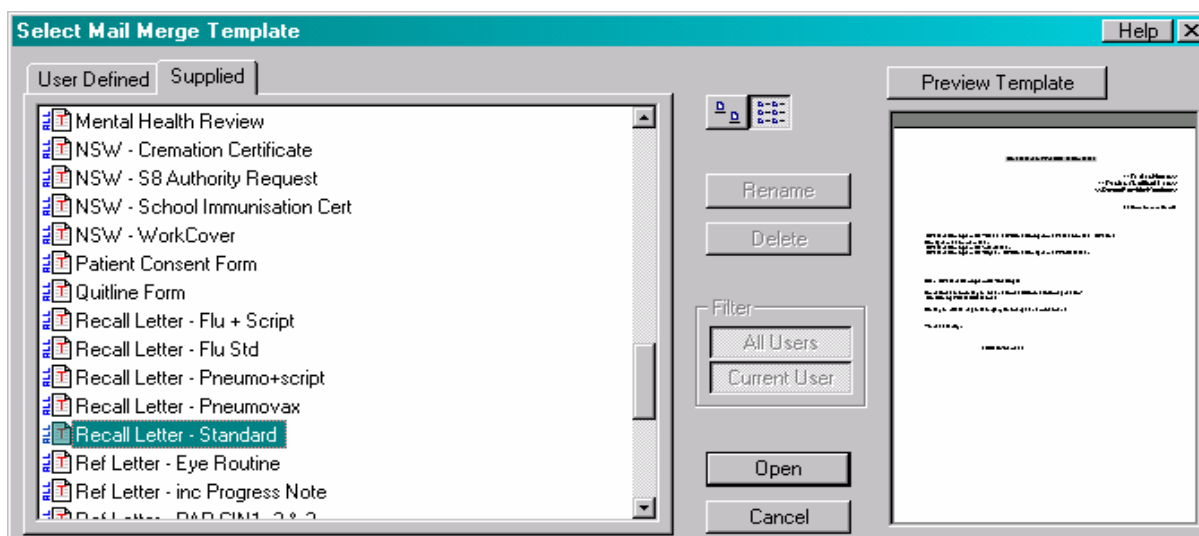
To check that the Actions database is turned on, go to the main page and select **Tools/Options**, then select the **Prompts** tab from the box. In the list of prompts scroll down and check that the **Action List** box is ticked.

Performing a Mail Merge

By performing a mail merge you can produce a personalised recall letter to each of the patients in your recall list.

To perform a mail merge the recall list:

- Click **'Mail merge'**
- The **'Select Mail Merge Template'** window will appear. You can select a template for the letter from either the **'User Defined'** or **'Supplied'** lists. A number of letters are already supplied including a generic recall letter that inserts the reason for recall into the letter.



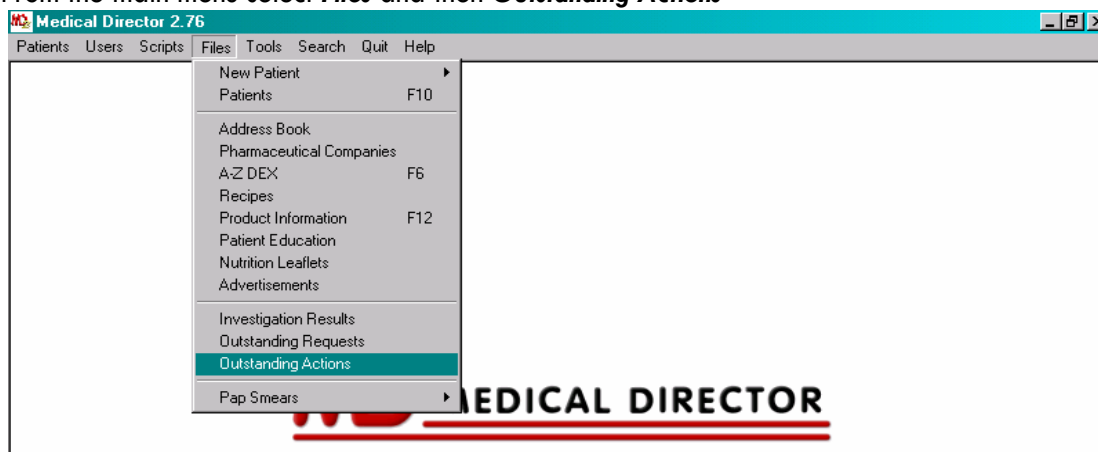
* You can also create your own letter or modify any existing template to suit your own needs by using **'Letter Writer'** from the **Main Menu** ► **Tools** ► **Letter Writer**.

- Click the **Open** button and your mail merge is performed and the recall letters will be printed. A copy of the letter is added to each patient's record and can be viewed using the **Letters** tab on the patient's clinical window.

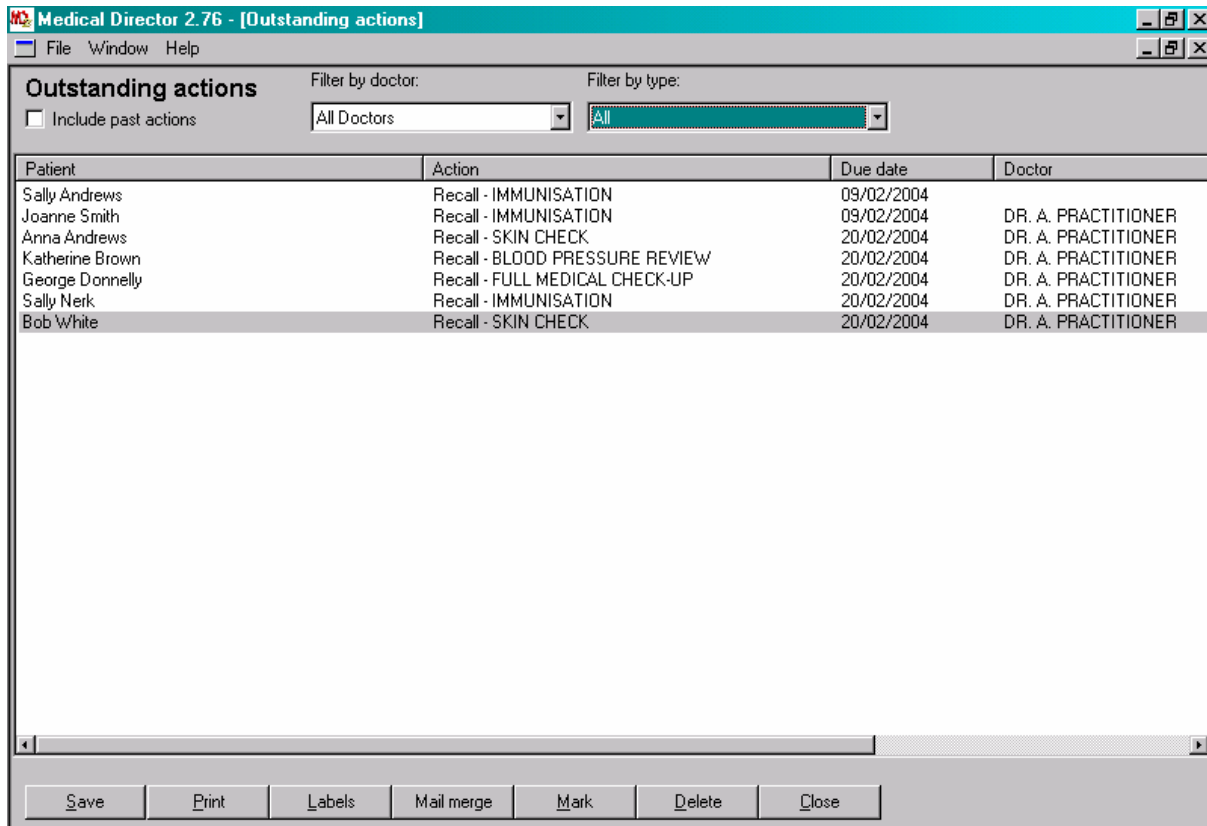
Checking for Outstanding Actions

Once you have sent your recall and reminder letters to patients it is important to follow-up any people that have not responded to their recall by attending the practice for an appointment. This is particularly important if you are recalling people who have had abnormal test results. You can check all outstanding actions by:

- From the main menu select **Files** and then **Outstanding Actions**



This will display a list of all actions not yet performed:



You now have the option to:

Save: allows you to save the action list as a database file

Print: print the list of actions

Labels: print address labels for the patients on the list

Mark: mark the action as performed, this removes the action from the patient's outstanding actions list

Mail Merge: perform a mail merge using a letter template (as previously described)

Delete: removes the highlighted action from the list

You can also:

Filter by Doctor: Allows you to filter the outstanding actions by Doctor.

Filter by Type: Allows you to filter the outstanding actions by type

Note: To ensure the follow up of patients needing urgent review, the Outstanding Action List should be checked more regularly for specific types of actions (eg. abnormal pap result/repeat pap smear etc).

Appendix 1:

Example of a Reminder Letter

PRACTICE LETTERHEAD

<DATE>

<Patient Full Name>

<Patient Address>

Dear <Patient First Name>,

This is a courtesy note to remind you that, according to our records, you are now due for <recall/reminder reason>.

Please contact the surgery between <operating hours> to make an appointment. Please bring this letter when you come for your appointment.

If you have already seen the doctor or visited another medical practice about this issue, please let us know so that we can keep your medical records up-to-date.

If you have any difficulties attending the surgery, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

Yours sincerely,

<The Medical Centre>

or

<Doctor>

Appendix 2:

Example of Information that could be used for a Poster for Waiting Room

**This Practice uses a
Recall and Reminder system
to provide preventive care
for our patients**

The Recall and Reminder System assists in ensuring that important health checks and activities are not forgotten and are performed on time.

We may issue you with a reminder letter or possibly a phone call from time to time to remind you when it's time to visit your doctor for a check-up or as a follow-up to health risks that have previously been found.

If you have any questions or concerns about this system please discuss this with your doctor.

If you do not wish to be included in our recall and reminder system please advise reception or your doctor.

Appendix 3:

Example of an Information Sheet for Patients

RECALLS AND REMINDERS

This practice uses a "Recall and Reminder" system to provide preventive care for its patients.

This will assist in ensuring that important health checks are not forgotten and are performed on time. You will be reminded when it is time to visit your doctor for a check-up or as a follow-up to health risks that have previously been found. The reminder system will include checks to help in the prevention or early detection of certain conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and forms of cancer – particularly cervical and prostate cancer, and immunisation follow-up.

In some cases, the reminders can also be sent from other places, e.g. the government pap smear register (for the detection of cervical cancer).

We will use information from your health record to tell us the check-ups for which you are due and when you should visit your doctor to discuss the tests that are needed. We may issue you with a reminder notice from time to time via a letter or possibly a phone call to remind you about these check-ups.

By allowing us to send you these reminders, you will help us to detect serious conditions early and to monitor known conditions. This can significantly improve the long-term outcome for you.

When you have had your test your doctor will tell you how you can get the results – e.g. by phone, or by a visit to the doctor a few days after the test.

Even when you agree to be included in the Recall and Reminder system, you should remember when you should be tested for certain conditions and should always contact your doctor to get the results of a test that has been performed. We may not always be able to reach you, especially if you have moved and the contact information on your record has not been updated.

Please discuss with your doctor any concerns or questions you have to do with the Recall and Reminder system. If you do not wish to be included in our recall and reminder system please advise reception or your doctor.

Adapted from the RACGP's "Recall Notice"

Appendix 3:

Example of Information to include in Policy and Procedures Manual

Recall and Reminder Policy

This practice uses a recall and reminder system to provide systematic preventative care for patients and to remind patients of ongoing health check-ups and tests. The patient reminder system allows for notices to be issued by the practice to remind the patient that preventative treatment is due.

The practice uses the following system for recall and reminder:

<add or remove as applicable to your practice>

- Card-based file system showing due dates for preventative activities
- Book register of patients who are due for recall
- Systematic flagging of patient files for opportunistic preventative activities
- Computerised reminder system
- Reminder systems offered by other agencies (subject to informed patient consent) e.g. local pathology services or NSW Pap Test Register

The activities involved in the recall and reminder system include:

<add or remove as applicable to your practice>

- Immunisations
- Pap smears
- Blood pressure testing
- Cholesterol testing
- Annual medical tests
- Diabetes reviews

It is the responsibility of <name of position> to add patient details to the recall and reminder system and to update and action recalls and reminders in the system.

It is the responsibility of <name of position> to generate the list of patients for recall and reminder. Lists will be generated every <state frequency>.

The doctor checks these lists to see if it is still current and advises of any changes to the list.

As a minimum, this practice will attempt to contact the patient via the following methods:

<add or remove as applicable to your practice>

- 2 letters will be forwarded, marked private and confidential
- If the patient does not respond, then a reminder phone call will be made

All attempts to contact the patient will be documented in their medical record.

Once the patient has responded to the reminder by attending the practice (or advised the practice of their need not to attend) the reminder flag will be removed from the patients file and/or reminder system.

Please note: This is not a policy for following-up patients with abnormal test results.