

The use of stencilled labels in general practice

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SUMMARY. A system of using wet (ink) stencils to prepare self-adhesive labels showing the patient's name and address is described. Several uses are illustrated in general practice and other systems are considered.

Introduction

There are many repetitive tasks in general practice which are amenable to delegation, of which one of the most frequent must be the accurate writing of the patient's name and address. This is used on all prescription headings, on pathology forms, on continuation cards, referral letters, and pathology specimens. The name (including the forename) must be accurate, and there is an inevitable temptation to contract the form to the initial and a nominal address. However the accuracy is greatly enhanced by effective recording of these facts.

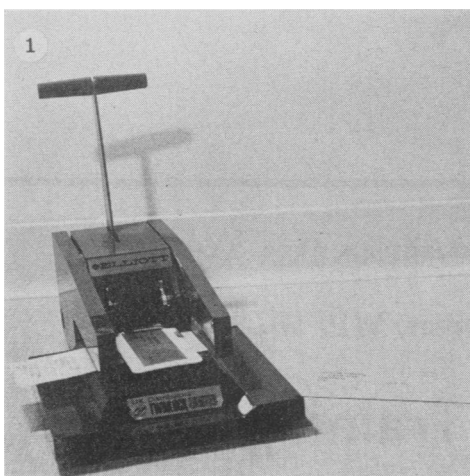


Figure 1. Machine for making labels.

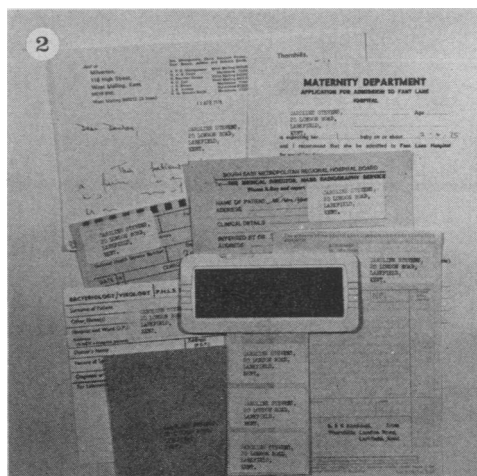


Figure 2. Some uses of labels in NHS general practice.

Labels

I therefore concluded that the optimum method of providing the name and address would be on an adhesive label. It should have the following requirements:

- (1) It should be clearly legible, and not possible to erase,
- (2) The adhesive should be permanent, and attempted removal should destroy the form to which it was attached,
- (3) The labels should be easily filed loose in the patient's notes,
- (4) The size should not obliterate the other writing on the prescription.

These objectives were achieved by labels measuring 2.5×5 cm. ($1'' \times 2''$) with permanent self-adhesive backs, supplied by Messrs. S. P. J. Labels Ltd., of East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent.

Stencils

There were several methods of printing the name and address on the labels. The requirements that I chose were:

- (1) The preparation should be economical of secretarial time,
- (2) The printing of the label should be easy, cheap, and should not involve expensive machinery,
- (3) Neither process should be messy,
- (4) It should be easily possible to file and recover the master stencil so that small numbers of labels could be prepared and then readily repeated,
- (5) It should not damage our present office machinery.

Choices available

I assessed the different types of masters by the above criteria. I costed for a nominal practice of 10,000 i.e., three partners.

Practice of 10,000—costed in June 1973

		£
<i>Pitney Bowes</i>	Basic printing machine	148.00
	Tray for 200 foils	1.77
	Carrier plates 200	6.00
	Carbon ribbon	1.94
	Foils—10,000	80.25
		<hr/>
		237.96
<i>Addressograph</i>	Model 550-4 Addressograph with listing attachment	87.00
	Model 350 embossing machine	370.00
	Plastic cards	245.00
		702.00
<i>Elliott</i>	Elliott Model 6723 electric	300.00
	Filing cabinet and trays	69.40
	Address cards	175.00
	Imperial 80 typer (manual)	165.00
		<hr/>
		709.40
<i>Elliott/Multiform</i>	Elliott M.70 Addresser	28.00
	Typing kit (includes the wet conditioner)	9.10
	Address cards (stencils)	175.00
	Envelopes for stencils	24.41
		236.51
For all these systems. Fifty thousand self-adhesive labels, 5 cm. × 3.75 cm. (2" × 1½") at £1.60 per 10,000		53.00

After analysis and trial, the optimum stencil was found to be that produced by Dymo Business Systems Ltd. Although it initially appeared to be complicated to type and messy, this was not confirmed by use, and I find the stencil is relatively cheap. The last system listed (M 70 Addresser) was chosen for printing. This has a cheap and easily used machine. My Family Practitioner Services, having tested the labels, has agreed to their use on prescriptions.

Method

(1) Either stencils can be made out for a doctor's whole list at once from the age-sex register, or the record envelopes, or stencils can be made out for any patient requiring a consultation at home or in the surgery as the requests are made by the patient. These being made out immediately before each surgery started. I have used this last method.

(2) Content. The patient's forename, surname and address are cut, and since only half the stencil is used, the date of birth is cut on the other half to aid identification and help research.

Although it might seem preferable to include the date of birth on the label, the Family Practitioner Services (and a few patients) advised that this could be embarrassing to some patients.

(3) Five labels are made for each patient, the stencil is then stored in a small buff envelope in the patient's notes, printed also with the stencil.

(4) When further labels are required the used backing paper is clipped to the outside of the medical record envelope for action by the secretary.

The stencils are supplied by Elliott's in boxes of 250, and are damped to help cutting, and then cut on an ordinary office typewriter using a clip on the roller. This method is easy, and does not damage either typewriter or roller. One local hospital cut all its stencils this way until eventually buying a specially adapted Imperial 88 typewriter, purchased from Elliott at a cost of £165.00.

The stencil is then inserted into the M.70 Addresser, inked and the labels printed. The labels are immediately dry (and indelible) and the marginally damp stencil is put into the envelope, which is stored in the medical record envelope and then ready for immediate re-use. This does not involve any special filing system, and the whole job is clean for the operator. There is no limit to the number of prints that may be made by the stencil.

Costs

From 6 August 1973, when the scheme was started, 1,537 stencils have been cut, and 7,685 labels were printed in the initial printout. A total of 1,860 repeat labels have been made to the 5 April 1974.

Present prices are:

Stencils	.. .. .	..	£19.80 per thousand
Labels 5 cm. × 2.5 cm. (2" × 1")	.. .. .	..	£1.35 per thousand
Envelopes 15 cm. × 9 cm.	.. .. .	..	£1.35 per thousand
One M.70 Addresser	.. .. .	..	£28.00
One typewriter attachment and conditioner	.. .. .	..	£9.10

Conclusion

The time, energy and stress saved in writing out these repetitive details has been enormous. The uses of these pre-addressed stencils and labels are constantly expanding for they can be used not only for prescriptions, pathology forms and specimens, continuation cards and other forms, but the stencils can also be used for addressing envelopes directly in screening programmes and cervical smear recalls. The stencils can be used directly on to groups of National Health Service prescription forms and for prescriptions of iron and folic acid in pregnancy, and for repeat prescriptions.

In the event of a practice using this method, it would be advisable to use Elliott Model 6723 (either manual or electric), which prints the labels semi-automatically.

Although other systems have their advantages, the Elliott stencils are easy for the secretary to use and the advantages to the doctor of using dry labels are great, compared to either the addressograph carbons or the spirit master system, both of which involve messy manipulations by the doctor.

Acknowledgements

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