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The Joys of Computing

Computers can complexify the simple, increase the drudgery of the straightforward, and make the difficult impossible. All of this in the interest of modernity. While the theoretical hazards of low-energy X-ray exposure from the CRT, the RF, and the clock have not been proven dangerous, the musculoskeletal problems secondary to poor equipment placement and the eyestrain resulting from poor lighting conditions or screen resolution are real.

The combination of physical ailments and the frustration induced by cryptic messages designed to induce anxiety [**device not found error** (could the machine really lose a disk drive?), **fatal runtime error** (what form of CPR is required to bring it back?), **file not found** (where did my last two hours of work go?)] contribute to the syndrome of computer stress.

It may seem odd for a citizen of these technologically sophisticated times to be afraid of common household devices, but it should be understandable. Modern computing can turn a simple task such as balancing the checkbook into a painfully complex, time-consuming, and less than rewarding experience. Is that the price of progress; and must this progress always be accompanied by pain?

We're not talking high technology here, nor looking to reveal profound philosophical truth. This is simply a cry of frustration resulting from that well-known feeling of helplessness that arrives when you know what you want the machine to do, know it can do it, but don't know the magic words. It is a sensation somewhere between anger, bewilderment, and fear and it produces a paralysis of mind and body.

Perhaps the reason for the frustration with much of the software available on today's machines is just that the commands are not intuitive. In order to make it run, you have to memorize a series of codes and commands and keystrokes that, all told, are akin to memorizing the Brooklyn White Pages. And then, of course, no two programmers think alike. They take pride in their independence, in being able to design software that confuses or outwits other programmers; while what it does to you would, in some jurisdictions, be considered manslaughter.

What we really need is the F13 button (not presently available on my keyboard). This soft metallic, lamp-shaped appendage would when rubbed, not pushed, override all systems and software and provide a universal translator which would speak to you, literally speak to you, in your native tongue.

The voice from F13 would ask, in a most solicitous voice, "Yes, master?" Then, after receiving your instructions, would promptly reply, "Your wish is my command."

Is that too much to ask?

H. William Strauss
Editor, *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*