

X found in the Transaction File. At the end of a day, all completed tests in the Transaction File are moved to the Past Results File, deleted from the Transaction File, and linking established from the Patient Description File to the Past Results File. Incompleted tests are deleted if item 5, TF is -1. If item 5, TF is -2 or -3 it is changed to -1 or -2 to hold the test in the Transaction File for an additional day or two. Note that the test life for a particular type of test can be designated in the Test Library Item 6.

The above description of the routines of FIGS. 2-5 point out the relationship between the four main files of the system of FIG. 1. It is through the provision of these files in a manner such as described in system 10, that objects of this invention are accomplished. However, the details of how the particular files are internally arranged and how they are accessed by a particular program can be varied without varying the basic system of this invention.

From the foregoing it will be seen that this invention is one well adapted to attain all of the ends and objects hereinabove set forth, together with other advantages which are obvious and which are inherent to the method and apparatus.

It will be understood that certain features and sub-combinations are of utility and may be employed without reference to other features and sub-combinations. This is contemplated by and is within the scope of the claims.

As many possible embodiments may be made of the invention without departing from the scope thereof, it is to be understood that all matter herein set forth or shown in the accompanying drawings is to be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

The invention having been described, what is claimed is:

1. An automatic data processing system for handling medical and patient records on an in-line basis during daily functioning of a hospital comprising: a central station including data processing apparatus for storage and processing of medical and patient records, said data processing apparatus providing for storage of separate files which may be individually accessed for record storage or retrieval, said separate files including a Patient Description File for storing descriptive data on patients of said hospital, a Test Library File for storing data concerning pathological tests available at said hos-

pital, a Transaction File for relatively short term storing of patient and test data being acted on, and a Past Results File for storing past patient test data; at least one test request station including a test request device for permitting an operator to enter a test request into said Transaction File for a particular test on a particular patient specimen, and a readout device for providing readout of data in said Transaction File, interface means connecting the test request device and the readout device to said Transaction File, at least one data collection station including at least one analytical device for performing a test, and interface means for permitting data collected at said data collection station to be transferred to said Transaction File and means for automatically transferring completed transaction data in said Transaction File into said Past Result File at preselected intervals of time.

2. A method of storing and retrieving pathological data in a hospital or clinic by use of a data processing machine, comprising the steps of storing information concerning a plurality of a pathological tests in said processing machine to comprise a Test Library File, including storage of an identification number for each such test; providing for readout of such information from said data processing machine for a specific test in response to a request to the machine by test number of a specific test; temporarily storing on line in a Transaction File in said data processing machine, data concerning a specific patient test, including storing a test accession number, test number, and patient number for each said test; providing for readout of data in said Transaction File of a specific patient test in response to a request including one of said test accession number, or patient number; storing in a Patient Description File in said data processing machine specific patient description information and storing a patient number for each patient, providing for readout of storage information concerning a particular patient in response to a request including the assigned patient number; providing a Past Result File for storage for a preselected relatively long period of time of test data concerning the patients described in said Patient Description File, which test data is periodically collected from said Transaction File over said period of time; and at preselected short intervals of time transferring test data stored in said Transaction File to said Past Result File for storage for said preselected relatively long period of time.

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