

GRAPHICAL COMPUTER SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING

TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates to computer-implemented methods and systems for scheduling appointments with clients and customers at medical offices, auto repair facilities, beauty salons and other types of businesses.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BACKGROUND ART

Computer programs for appointment scheduling have been known in the art. Such programs have been provided for use by users to make their own respective schedules. There has not been a program in which one or more staff members can schedule appointments for a group of professionals or for a group of facility or equipment resources.

In the field of veterinary medicine, as in other medical fields, there is a need to schedule appointments for veterinary doctors and other veterinary professionals and resources in a group practice over days, weeks and months of the year.

According to usual procedures, appointments are scheduled by office personnel in response to contacts with the owner of patient animals for a large number of professionals and resources in a group practice. Any computer program for this purpose should be easy to use. The screen displays should avoid visual clutter and should provide visual keys which assist the user in detecting matters that need attention. The program should include aids to the scheduler for scheduling various kinds of medical appointments.

Such a program should take advantage of the most up-to-date operating systems available for personal computers, including capabilities for networking of computers in an office environment.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention provides a computer-implemented method and computer program for displaying a plurality of schedules for a corresponding group of persons or resources, each schedule including i) a title bar identifying the individual or resource, ii) a vertical time graph extending over at least one day having colored bars corresponding in color and length to corresponding types and lengths of appointments, respectively, and iii) a plurality of appointment rows corresponding to time slots available for appointments during the day.

The invention also allows entry of standardized appointment types by name, group and duration. When scheduling appointments, a scheduler can select from a list of appointment types and use the pre-defined duration to set an end time in relation to a desired start time for the appointment.

In a further aspect of the invention, the plurality of schedules in the selected group are displayed horizontally on a page having a width that is greater than the width of a display area of the computer screen, and a horizontal scroll bar for the group of appointment schedules is provided to allow scrolling across the plurality of schedules.

The invention also allows for weekly views of a plurality of schedules for a selected person or resource, and a monthly view of all appointments for the month, or for a specific date in the month for a specific group or resource.

The invention further provides for sorting of the appointment file, and for convenient modification of appointments using a pop-up menu.

The invention further provides for displaying a patient dialog box including identification of multiple patients, and a color designating overall status of the patient, a health warning icon for any health warning conditions and a plurality of status icons representing status of certain medical conditions associated with an individual patient.

The invention further provides a "month view" screen display including a monthly calendar showing the number of appointments for each day, a file of appointments organized in columns by field, and radio buttons responsive to user inputs for listing all appointments for the month or for listing appointments by at least one of: by day, by group and by resource. In response to a right hand button mouse click, a pop-up menu is displayed for modifying appointments in the appointment list.

The invention further provides a "find appointments" command, which when executed, displays a "find appointments" dialog box for receiving data defining a specific resource, a date range, a time range and an appointment status to define the scope of the retrieval of appointments in the database file for display.

The invention further provides for a report of "missing appointments" command, and displays a dialog box for receiving data defining a specific group and a date range to limit the appointments listed in a missed appointments report.

The invention further provides an "options" command for displaying a dialog box for receiving data defining criteria for importing patient data from a patient database file.

The invention further provides a "preferences" command for displaying a dialog box for receiving data defining a rate at which new data input into the computer system is used to update the appointments file.

Other objects and advantages of the invention, besides those discussed above, will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art from the description of the preferred embodiment which follows. In the description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof, and which illustrate examples of the invention. Such examples, however, are not exhaustive of the various embodiments of the invention, and therefore, reference is made to the claims which follow the description for determining the scope of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a desktop computer with a start-up screen display illustrating the start-up operation of a computer system utilizing the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an elevational view of a "day view" screen display for the application program running on the computer of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an elevational view of a "month view" screen display for the application program running on the computer of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a second elevational view of the "month view" screen display seen in FIG. 3;

FIG. 5 is an elevational view of an "Add Appointment" dialog box for the application program running on the computer of FIG. 1;

FIG. 6 is an elevational view of a "Patient List" status box for the application program running on the computer of FIG. 1;

FIG. 7 is an elevational view of a "Status Color" panel of an "Options" multi-panel dialog box for the application program running on the computer of FIG. 1;