



COMMON SERVICES AGENCY  
GENERAL MANAGER  
TRINITY PARK HOUSE

Dear Colleague

**THE YEAR 2000  
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH COMPUTER SYSTEMS**

**Summary**

1. This letter addresses the need for each organisation within the NHS in Scotland to initiate urgently a programme of work to ensure that serious problems do not arise when, in the year 2000, computer based information systems encounter a new century for the first time. The Deputy Prime Minister has asked all Departments to review the action being carried out within their spheres of responsibility and to report on the actions being taken.

**Background**

2. For the most part, computer systems have been written to recognise two digits for the year component of the date. This has worked satisfactorily, in practical terms, but as the year 2000 approaches systems will have to interpret the year '00' and many will, as presently written, assume 1900 rather than 2000. It is important to understand that the problems can occur well in advance of the year 2000 - for example in recall systems where a forward date is projected. The problem is therefore, an urgent one which must be addressed quickly.

3. An additional complication arises from the fact that the year 2000 is also a leap year. Routines within software designed to recognise leap years may not successfully recognise the year 2000 as a leap year.

4. The recording and manipulation of dates is very important to a wide range of systems used by the NHS in Scotland and failure to interpret dates properly may have a serious impact on systems supporting patient care as well as finance, human resources etc.

5. The solution is to identify every instance of date recording and processing of date information; to change the date from two digits to four digits and to reprogram as necessary any calculations or processes which use the date.

NHS Management Executive  
St. Andrew's House  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
27 August 1996

**Addressees**

For action:  
General Managers, Health Boards

Chief Executives, NHS Trusts

General Manager, Common Service Agency

General Manager,  
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For information:  
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**Enquiries to:**

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6. The entire range of computer software which operates in NHS organisations may be affected. This includes all bespoke application software and all third party supplied software including operating systems software. Bespoke software will have to be assessed and corrected as necessary. The problem will also extend to facilities dependent on computer systems e.g. some medical equipment, telephone exchanges and even some lifts. Assurances will have to be sought from all 3rd party suppliers. A first step will be an inventory of all software used across each organisation.

7. The scale of the problem is significant and may require significant resources. The Government is determined that this problem is addressed seriously and urgently.

### Action

8. Each Health Board and NHS Trust and the Common Services Agency should initiate a year 2000 project by producing a strategy to ensure that all systems based on electronic computers are reviewed to be able to handle the year 2000.

9. The Annex to this circular contains recommendations covering the actions which will be necessary.

11. The Information Systems Support Group of Scottish Healthcare Supplies, CSA, have been asked to undertake a central co-ordinating role:

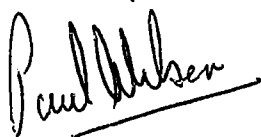
- \* assisting Health Boards, NHS Trusts, the Common Services Agency and other NHS in Scotland entities to develop appropriate strategies to deal with the issue
- \* ensuring that Year 2000 strategies are produced for centrally managed systems, e.g. Community and Preventative Care Systems
- \* providing a source of advice to Boards, Trusts, GPs and the user groups of particular software packages (e.g. HOMER)
- \* monitoring progress to enable the Department to report back to the Deputy Prime Minister
- \* facilitating cross fertilisation of issues, problems and solutions across the service.

12. Health Boards and NHS Trusts are asked to notify Peter MacIntyre, (0131-551 8370) the Assistant Director, ISSG, as Project Co-ordinator for the Year 2000 project at ISSG of the name of the senior officer nominated as responsible for developing their strategy. Health Boards and NHS Trusts are asked to ensure outline strategies are made available to Charlie Knox at Computing & IT Strategy Division, ME by 31 October, 1996.

13. Please note that this subject will be considered for discussion at all future meetings of Chairmen and Executive Directors.

14. Health Boards are asked to bring the contents of this circular and the Annex to the attention of General Practitioners in their area. In particular they should note that the GPASS product has been investigated and complies with Year 2000 requirements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Wilson", written over a horizontal line.

**PAUL WILSON**  
Director of Trusts

**YEAR 2000**

**STRATEGY FOR ELIMINATING YEAR 2000 PROBLEMS**

1. Formal management responsibility for the year 2000 project should be assigned to a senior officer who will be responsible for developing a strategy to deal with the problem.
2. All software applications in use must be identified, including centrally maintained programs under the control of the IT Department and locally developed (other ad-hoc) applications. Each application must be assessed for year 2000 compliance, both alone and in conjunction with any other applications with which it interacts.
3. At the end of the inventory stage the scope of the problem will be known, a forward plan can be documented and first cost and resource estimates made.
4. There is also a need to establish "clean management" procedures and practices to stop the problem getting worse.
5. Applications maintained by an organisation's own IT Staff are only part of the problem. Applications software such as spreadsheets and databases which are run on individual PCs must also be checked to ensure that they will process date information correctly. Much vendor supplied software, from operating systems to accounting suites, is not Year 2000 compliant. All vendors on which you are dependent must demonstrate their willingness and ability to achieve compliance within the timescales required by your organisation. Contracts should be reviewed for vendor liability, and if necessary renegotiated. New contracts should be drafted to explicitly require Year 2000 compliance.
6. When vendor supplied software is widely used across the NHS in Scotland and when there is a User Group the issue should be raised within the User Group to establish whether discussions with the supplier can be co-ordinated.
7. For application software developed and maintained in-house there is no alternative to detailed analysis, and in some cases reverse engineering, of the source code and file structures of all applications which may not meet year 2000 requirements.

August 1996