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card 1 of 1

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COMPUTER-BASED MEDICAL DECISION MAKING: FROM MYCIN TO VM

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Decision making using symbolic processing techniques has been explored by the development of systems that incorporate both statistical data and the judgmental (subjective) knowledge of medical experts. The evolution of techniques in one such research project is discussed, using as examples the MYCIN program for selection of antimicrobial therapy and the VM (Ventilator Manager) program for interpretation of measurements and management of ventilators in the intensive care unit. One method for the representation of clinical knowledge, production rules, has been the basis for the work described. The report compares the design criteria for the two expert consultation systems. Also described are the special design requirements for a program to operate in the intensive care unit, and the influence on VM of several years' experience with the MYCIN system.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970's, researchers on computer-based medical reasoning have begun to recognize the potential benefits of applying symbolic reasoning techniques in clinical domains [1]. One such research group is the Heuristic Programming Project at Stanford University. The first medical reasoning program developed by the project, known as the MYCIN System [2], adopted symbolic processing techniques largely in response to a conviction that computer-based consultation systems, in order to be accepted by physicians, should be able to explain how and why a particular conclusion has been derived. Such systems should also be able to incorporate, organize, manipulate, and update large quantities of medical knowledge. Subsequently, a series of additional medical application programs using MYCIN's techniques have been created. In this paper we compare MYCIN, a program for infectious disease diagnosis and therapy, with a newer system, the Ventilator Manager (VM) program for measurement interpretation in the intensive care unit (ICU). Each of these programs uses a representation scheme, known as production rules [3], to encode the medical knowledge used for decision making. Each production rule is stated in the form: "situation implies conclusion." Production rules may be chained together to form a line of reasoning leading from observed patient data to diagnostic and therapeutic conclusions. This report discusses the strengths of this form of knowledge representation and shows how production rules can be applied in two somewhat different clinical applications.

We begin by presenting the reasons that symbolic processing has been utilized for medical decision making. A brief discussion of the MYCIN program and a more detailed discussion of the VM program are included to demonstrate the use of the symbolic processing techniques. The design criteria for the two programs are compared. Differences in design criteria, plus experience with the MYCIN program, led to the extensions to the methodology described in the final section.

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2 THE RATIONALE FOR USING SYMBOLIC PROCESSING TECHNIQUES

There is increasing evidence that computer-based diagnosis and therapy programs will be accepted

by physicians only if they meet a stringent set of design criteria. Several sets of design requirements have been suggested [4, 5]. Although the overriding goal for any computer-based consultation program is, of course, that it be accurate, Gorry has suggested [4] that clinical decision systems should ideally have three additional capabilities: (1) the ability to maintain and manipulate a set of symbolic concepts, rather than simply numbers, (2) the ability to interact with clinicians using natural language, and (3) the ability to explain the reasoning process used to make conclusions. These goals were derived from his experience with a program that used decision analysis for the management of acute renal failure [6]. He concluded that detailed knowledge of medical concepts and the relationships between concepts would be required to reach reasonable conclusions reflecting a sense of the clinical context of the patient's problems. This could provide the program with a pragmatic view of the situation being analyzed. He encouraged the development of natural language communication in order to expedite the transfer of expertise, both from the expert to the program during the creation and expansion of the knowledge base and from the program to the user when the program becomes a clinical tool.

These criteria imply that the same piece of knowledge must be used in many different ways. The knowledge should be represented in a fashion that does not limit the manner in which it can be used. In many programming languages, one part of a program cannot access or modify another part. Thus, incorporating the knowledge directly into the program's procedures limits the possible utilization of that knowledge. Facts must be in a form that can be manipulated as easily as numerical data are manipulated in conventional programming tasks.

The subfield of computer science known as Artificial Intelligence (AI) [7] has concentrated on using computers for symbolic reasoning rather than calculating with numbers. One goal of our project has been to determine the strengths and limitations of the production rule methodology drawn from AI. Production rules offer the advantage of containing a small "packet" of knowledge. These packets can be combined to create a knowledge base of facts and relations known to the system. Using current symbolic processing languages, these rules can be translated from an external English-like syntax into an internal form that can be examined and interpreted by a task-independent control program. Because they can be displayed in English for communication with the user, and because they also facilitate the development of simple techniques for understanding natural language, production rules have allowed us to respond effectively to the design criteria outlined above.

3 OVERVIEW OF MYCIN

MYCIN selects antimicrobial therapy for patients with severe infections [2]. The program uses knowledge obtained from infectious disease specialists; this knowledge was captured in the form of heuristics or "rules of thumb" that relate microbiological data and clinical signs and symptoms with possible pathogenic organisms. The details of the MYCIN program have been outlined in several other publications referenced below and will be described only briefly here.

3.1 *Knowledge Representation*

The MYCIN system is built around a set of medical concepts such as the surgical history of the patient or the identity of infecting organisms. Each of these concepts is called a clinical parameter. Relations between the clinical parameters are used to build production rules of the form, "If PREMISE then ACTION." The PREMISE of the rule is formed by the conjunction of statements about clinical parameters—e.g., "the age is greater than 8" or "the patient has had recent neurosurgery," The ACTION portion of the rule states what conclusions can be drawn from the PREMISE with an associated measure of certainty. The English translation of a MYCIN rule is shown in Figure 1.

RULE 209
If:
1) The site of the culture is blood, and
2) There is significant disease associated with this occurrence of the organism, and
3) The portal of entry of the organism is GI, and
4) The patient is a compromised host
Then:
It is definite (1.0) that bacteroides is an organism for which therapy should cover.

FIGURE 1 Example MYCIN rule. This is the English translation of a rule used to determine which organism may be causing the patient's infection.

To perform a consultation, the rules must be combined together to form a line of reasoning [8]. MYCIN uses a goal-directed approach to integrate the knowledge, a process known as "backward-chaining." Starting with the top-level goal (i.e., to prescribe appropriate therapy), the program selects the set of rules that make a conclusion about this goal in their ACTION part. The PREMISE of each of these rules is evaluated to determine if a rule can be applied. If a fact needed to evaluate this PREMISE is not available, then the program identifies other rules that make conclusions about the needed fact (or asks the user if no rules exist). In this manner, only the portion of the rule set that is relevant to the particular patient is examined. The number of questions asked is also minimized by this goal-directed search through the knowledge base.

The consultation program manipulates the rules as described above, but itself contains no knowledge about infectious diseases. The system also contains explanation and question/answering facilities that interact with both the knowledge in the rule set and an ongoing record of how rules were applied during a consultation [9]. The definition and propagation of the measure of uncertainty ("certainty factor") associated with each rule has also been a major area of concentration [10]. Evaluations [11, 12] have shown that the performance of the system approaches that of the subspecialist in the two areas (bacteremia and meningitis) for which the knowledge base has been developed.

4 OVERVIEW OF VM

The VM program is designed to interpret on-line quantitative data in the intensive care unit (ICU). These data are used to manage post-surgical patients receiving mechanical ventilatory assistance. VM is an extension of a physiologic monitoring system [13], and is designed to perform five specialized tasks in the ICU: (1) to detect possible measurement errors, (2) to recognize untoward events in the patient/machine system and suggest corrective action, (3) to summarize the patient's physiologic status, (4) to suggest adjustments to therapy based on the patient's status over time and long-term therapeutic goals, and (5) to maintain a set of patient-specific expectations and goals for future evaluation by the program. The program produces interpretations of the physiologic measurements over time, using a model of the therapeutic procedures in the ICU and clinical knowledge about the diagnostic implications of the data.

Most medical decision making programs, including the MYCIN system described above, have based their advice on data available at one particular time. In actual practice, the clinician receives additional information from tests and observations over time and reevaluates the diagnosis and prognosis of the patient. Both the progression of the disease and the response to prior therapeutic interventions are important for assessing the patient's situation.

Data are collected in different therapeutic contexts. In order to interpret the data properly, VM includes a model of the stages that a patient follows from ICU admission through the end of the critical monitoring phase. Correct interpretation of physiologic measurements depends on knowing which stage the patient is in. The goals for patient management are also stated in terms of these clinical contexts. The program maintains descriptions of the current and optimal ventilatory therapies for any given time.

Knowledge is represented in VM by production rules of the form:

IF: relations about one or more parameters hold
THEN:
1) make a conclusion based on these facts;
2) make appropriate suggestions to clinicians; and
3) create new expectations about the future values of parameters.

Additional information associated with each rule includes: the symbolic name, rule group (e.g., rules about instrument faults), main concept (definition) of the rule; and all of the therapeutic states in which it makes sense. Figure 2 shows a sample rule for determining hemodynamic stability.

The VM knowledge base includes rules to support five reasoning steps that recur whenever a new time segment begins. These are: (1) to characterize measured data as reasonable or spurious; (2) to determine therapeutic state of the patient (currently the mode of ventilation); (3) to adjust expectations of future values of measured variables when patient state changes; (4) to check physiologic status, including cardiac rate, hemodynamics, ventilation, oxygenation; and (5) to check compliance with long-term therapeutic goals. Each reasoning step is associated with a collection of rules, sorted by the type of conclusions made in

STATUS RULE: STABLE-HEMODYNAMICS
DEFINITION: Defines stable hemodynamics based on blood pressures and heart rates.
APPLIES to patients on VOLUME, CMV, ASSIST, T-PIECE
COMMENT: Look at mean arterial pressure for changes in blood pressure and systolic blood pressure for maximum pressures.
IF
HEART RATE is ACCEPTABLE
PULSE RATE does NOT CHANGE by 20 beats/min. in 15 min.
MEAN ARTERIAL PRESSURE is ACCEPTABLE
MEAN ARTERIAL PRESSURE does NOT CHANGE by 15 torr in 15 min.
SYSTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE is ACCEPTABLE
THEN
The HEMODYNAMICS are STABLE

FIGURE 2 Sample VM interpretation rule. The meaning of "ACCEPTABLE" varies with the clinical context—i.e., the type of ventilatory assistance. VOLUME, CMV, ASSIST and T-PIECE refer to types of ventilation therapies.

INITIALIZING RULE: INITIALIZE-CMV
DEFINITION: Initialize expectations for patients on controlled mandatory ventilation (CMV) therapy
APPLIES to all patients on CMV
IN ONE OF:
PATIENT TRANSITIONED FROM VOLUME TO CMV
PATIENT TRANSITIONED FROM ASSIST TO CMV
THEN EXPECT THE FOLLOWING:

		[acceptable range			]	
	very low	low	[ideal min	max]	high	very high
Mean pressure	60	75	80	95	110	120
Heart rate		60			110	
Expired pCO2	22	28	30	35	42	50

FIGURE 3 Portion of an initializing rule. This rule establishes initial expectations of acceptable and ideal ranges of variables. Not all ranges are defined for each measurement. pCO2 is a measure of the percentage of carbon dioxide in expired air measured at the mouth.

the ACTION portion of the rule—e.g., all rules that determine the validity of the data.

4.1 *Treating Measurement Ranges Symbolically*

Most of the rules represent the measurement values symbolically, using the terms "acceptable" or "ideal" to characterize the appropriate ranges. The actual meaning of "acceptable" changes as the patient moves from state to state, but the statement of the relation between the physiologic measurements remains constant. The use of symbolic statements (e.g., "heart rate is acceptable") allows for the exposition of common principles of physiologic interpretation in different contexts. In addition, it minimizes the number of rules needed to describe the complexity of the diagnostic situation.

The meaning of the symbolic range is determined by rules that establish expectations about the value of measured data. For example, when a patient is taken off the ventilator, the upper limit of acceptability for the expired carbon dioxide measurement is raised. The actual numeric calculation of "expired pCO2 high" in the PREMISE of any rule will change when the context switches (removal from ventilatory support), but the statement of the rules remains the same. An example rule that creates these expectations is shown in Figure 3.

4.2 *Rule Interpretation*

The VM rule interpreter is based on the MYCIN interpreter. The major changes are: (1) forward-chaining (data-driven) rule invocation as opposed to backward-chaining, (2) checking to see that information acquired in a previous time frame is still valid for making conclusions, and (3) cycling through appropriate parts of the rule set each time new information is available.

A data-driven approach is necessary to take advantage of the small set of measurement values available in each time frame. This means that the reasoning process works forward from the available information as opposed to working backward from a goal and obtaining information as necessary. Because of the demanding nature of the ICU environment, the system must acquire and interpret data with minimal staff intervention.

Each of the rule groups corresponding to the five reasoning steps mentioned above is considered in order. Each rule is examined to determine if it applies to the current context. The PREMISE of the rule is examined to determine validity and the appropriate conclusions are recorded by the program, as well as expectations on the future ranges of measurement values. Suggestions to clinicians are also printed out.

Often the examination of the rule PREMISE requires the utilization of a value acquired earlier—e.g., the temperature measurement, which is volunteered to the patient monitoring system on an episodic basis. The reliability of the stored value is determined by evaluating either a time constant (for variables that predictably change over time) or a rule (for cases in which the assessment of a value's reliability is dependent upon context-specific information). Associated with each parameter in the system is a specific mechanism for determining its reliability over time. If a measurement is concluded to be spurious or outdated, then it is treated as if it were unknown, requiring alternate methods for determining the status of the patient. The rule invocation process is repeated each time that a new set of measurements is available (currently every 2 to 10 minutes).

Identical conclusions made in contiguous time frames are represented by the interval specified by the times of the first and last assertion. A list of these intervals summarizes the history of a particular conclusion. The evaluation of a rule clause such as "Patient hyperventilating for the past 30 minutes" is made by direct examination of the time intervals stored along with conclusions, as opposed to looking at the original measurements. Expectations are associated with the appropriate measurement and are classified by duration and type, such as the upper limit of the acceptable-range. Expectations can persist for a fixed interval, such as "for twenty minutes starting in ten minutes," or for the duration of one or more clinical situations, e.g., "while the patient is on the ventilator."

5 COMPARISON OF DESIGN GOALS FOR MYCIN AND VM

MYCIN was designed to serve in the ward setting as an expert consultant for antimicrobial therapy selection. A typical interaction might take place after the patient has been diagnosed and preliminary cultures drawn but little microbiological data are available. In critical situations, a tentative decision about therapy must often be made pending actual culture results. In return for assistance in making this decision, the clinician is asked to spend the small amount of time required to see a consultation. As we have discussed, there are numerous challenges involved in the effort to motivate clinicians to use such a resource. The environment of the intensive care unit is quite different, however. Continuous surveillance and evaluation of the patient's status is required. The problem is one of making therapeutic adjustments over a long period of time, many of which are minor, such as adjusting the respiratory rate on the ventilator. The main reasons for interacting with VM would be to obtain status information or to investigate an unusual event. The program must therefore be able to interpret measurements with minimal human participation. When an interaction does take place—e.g., when an unexpected event is noted by the program— it must be terse and concise.

This difference in the timing and style of the man/machine interaction has considerable impact on system design. For example, the system must (1) presume that clinician input into the system will be brief, (2) use historical data to determine the clinical situation, (3) be able to provide advice at any point in the hospital course of the patient, (4) be able to follow-up on the outcomes of previous therapeutic decisions, and (5) be able to provide summaries of conclusions made over time. VM's environment thus differs from MYCIN's in that typed natural language input is an unlikely modality for communication with the clinician.

A consultation program should also be able to model the changing medical environment so that the program can interpret the available data in the appropriate context. Of course, areas like infectious diseases often have critical points where a consultation is most necessary. In the development of the meningitis section of the MYCIN knowledge base, the concept of "partially treated meningitis" (prior treatment with an antibiotic) was handled quite distinctly from the untreated case, even though the laboratory findings might be identical.

It was also necessary for VM to contain knowledge that could be used to evaluate the results of its therapeutic advice, just as a human consultant follows a case over a period of time. This is complicated by the fact that the user of the system may not follow the recommended therapy regimen. If the patient does not react as expected to the given therapy, then the program has to determine what alternate therapeutic steps may be required.

6 EXTENDING THE MYCIN DESIGN

The VM program has been used as a testbed to investigate methods for increasing the capabilities of symbolic processing approaches by extending the production rule methodology. The main area

of investigation has been in the representation of knowledge about dynamic clinical settings. There are two components to representing a situation that changes over time: (1) providing the mechanism for accessing and evaluating data in a new time frame; and (2) building a symbolic model to represent the ongoing processes in the medical environment.

Another aspect of the VM development has been to experiment with more general extensions to production rules based on observations of the use of the MYCIN system. These changes can be described by two research directions: (1) expanding the level of detail in the knowledge base; and (2) increasing the global structure of the knowledge base. The problem of designing an advice-giving program with limited man/machine interaction has also been explored.

6.1 *Representing Knowledge about Dynamic Clinical Settings*

With VM we have begun to experiment with mechanisms for providing MYCIN-like systems with the ability to represent the dynamic nature of the diagnosis and therapy process. The original MYCIN system was designed to produce therapeutic decisions for one critical moment in the patient's hospital course. This was extended with a "restart mechanism" that allows for selectively updating those parameters that might change in the interval between consultations. MYCIN can start a new consultation with the updated information, but the results of the original consultation are lost. In VM, three requirements are necessary to support the processing of new time frames: (1) examining the values of historical data and conclusions, (2) determining the validity of those data, and (3) combining new conclusions with previous conclusions.

New *PREMISE functions*, which define the relationships about parameters that can be tested when a rule is checked for validity, were created to examine the historical data. Example PREMISE functions used in MYCIN include tests to see if: (a) any value has been determined for a parameter, (b) the value associated with a parameter is in a particular numerical range, or (c) there is a particular value associated with a parameter. VM includes a series of time-related PREMISE functions. The first function examines trends in input data over time—e.g., "the mean arterial pressure does not rise by 15 torr in 15 minutes." A second function determines the stability of a series of measurements, by examining the variation of measurements over a specific time period. Other functions examine previously deduced conclusions, as in: "the patient has been on the T-piece for greater than 30 minutes" or "the patient has never been on the T-piece." Functions also exist for determining changes in the state of the patient—e.g., "the patient has transitioned from assist mode to the T-piece." When VM is required to check whether a parameter has a particular value, it must also check to see if the value is "recent" enough to be useful.

The notion that data are reliable for only a given period of time is also used in the representation of conclusions made by the program. When the same conclusion is made in contiguous time periods, (two successive evaluations of the rule set), then the conclusions are coalesced. The result is a series of intervals that specify when a parameter assumed a particular value. In the MYCIN system this information is stored as several different parameters. For example, the period when a drug was given is represented by a pair of parameters corresponding to the starting and ending times of administration. In MYCIN, if a drug was again started and stopped, a new entity—"DRUG-2"—would have to be created. The effect of the VM representation is to aggregate individual conclusions into "states" whose persistence denotes a meaningful interpretation of the status of the patient.

6.2 *Building a Symbolic Model*

A sequence of states recognized by the program represents a segmentation of a time line. Specifying the possible sequences of states in a dynamic setting constitutes a symbolic model of that setting. The VM knowledge base contains a model of the ventilatory therapies. This model is used in three ways by the program: (1) to limit the number of rules examined by the program; (2) to provide a basis for comparing actual therapy with potential therapies; and (3) to provide the basis for the adjustment of expectations used to interpret the incoming data.

Attached to each rule in VM is a list of the clinical situations in which the rule makes sense. When rules are selected for evaluation, this list is examined to determine if the rule is applicable. This provides a convenient filter to increase the speed of the program. A set of rules is utilized to specify the conditions for suggesting alternative therapeutic contexts. Since these rules are examined every few minutes, they serve both to suggest

when the patient's condition has changed sufficiently for an adjustment in ventilatory therapy, and to provide commentary concerning clinical maneuvers that have been performed but are not consistent with the embedded knowledge for making therapeutic decisions. The model also provides mechanisms for defining expectations about reasonable values for the measured data. Much of the knowledge in VM is stated in terms of these expectations, and they can be varied in response to changes in the patient's situation.

6.3 *Expanding the Level of Detail in the Knowledge Base*

Those who implement production rule systems often assume that the knowledge to be represented will be broken into small pieces corresponding to individual rules. What would happen in MYCIN if this assumption is violated? At one extreme there would be a single rule that weighed all of the clinical inputs in order to conclude the presence or absence of a single organism, say *E. coli*, but this would be too large and complicated to understand. The other extreme would be to base the deductive steps on the most minute details of physiologic knowledge—e.g., knowledge of the cell wall properties of each species of bacteria. Explanation and modification would be very difficult in either situation. The approach taken in the development of MYCIN has been between these two extremes. Although no fixed criteria have been established, an examination of the rule set shows that intermediate steps have been left out when they appeared to be definitional in nature. Since the major performance requirements of a consultation system —i.e., reaching correct hypotheses—revolve around propagation of the uncertainty associated with each piece of knowledge, definitional facts affect the outcome primarily by providing "common-sense" domain knowledge. Currently each of MYCIN's rules is augmented with a free-text justification or rationale that discusses some of the intervening steps that were used in formulating the particular content of that rule. The text justifications are available to the user if the basis for the knowledge in a rule is not clear from the translation of the rule itself (Figure 4).

Our representation of medical knowledge has been particularly stereotyped so that the programs we write can examine and manipulate the knowledge in many different ways. For example, in the middle of a MYCIN consultation the user can ask for an explanation of why a particular question is asked, resulting in the description of the chain of reasoning leading to the current rule under consideration [14, 9]. However, because a rule's justification is stored as unformatted text, it is unavailable for dissection and manipulation by the program as it gives explanations. It has become clear to us that the development of more formal mechanisms for encoding the basic knowledge which underlies a single rule (in a form that a computer can manipulate) will improve the educational and explanatory features of the program by providing an additional level of detail that can be explored and utilized programmatically. The detailed justifications could also be used for consistency checking since they represent the same knowledge but stated in terms of "first principles." The requirements for augmenting the knowledge base in this way for the purpose of tutoring medical students have been described by Clancey [15].

The approach taken in VM is to introduce additional rules that are often definitional in nature (for example, the rule in Figure 2 that defines

RULE 236
(This rule applies to organisms from positive cultures, and is tried in order to find out about the infection which requires therapy or whether there is significant disease associated with this occurrence of the organism.)

If:
1) The site of the culture is urine, and
2) The method of collection of the culture is voided, and
3) The colony count (in thousands) of the organism is greater than or equal to 100.
Then:
1) There is suggestive evidence (0.5) that the infection which requires therapy is cystitis, and
2) There is suggestive evidence (0.7) that there is significant disease associated with this occurrence of the organism.
Author: YU.
Comments: This definition of significance differs from E. Kass's original definition (Am. J. Med., 18: 764, 1955) where TWO consecutive cultures are required. However, for practical purposes, if the patient is symptomatic, physicians generally start treatment on the basis of only one culture.
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FIGURE 4 Example MYCIN rule with justification/comments.

hemodynamic stability). We have found that these additional rules act to form a convenient method for introducing abstract concepts into the rule base. This, in turn, has provided a basis for separating out the portion of the knowledge that was independent of the current context—e.g., the physiology—from the knowledge that must adjust to the changing medical situation.

6.4 *Increasing the Structure of the Knowledge Base*

In addition to the need for more highly formalized justifications associated with each rule, we have observed the potential value of a more global organization of the rule base. In the development of a set of rules for the treatment of meningitis, we identified a situation in which a series of very similar rules were used to represent a "case analysis" of patient findings. The development of the meningitis knowledge base also included the need to represent "default" decision rules that applied to the majority of the patients considered but could still be customized for individual patient histories. The problem was broken up into a master rule that would make a preliminary set of conclusions, and more specific rules that could modify the preliminary conclusions in response to unusual items from the patient's history. These more specific rules, therefore, cannot be understood without first considering the default rule. Two different methods can be used to handle this dependence. The first would be to rewrite each of the specific rules in order to incorporate all of the information in the default rule (and the default rule would then have to be changed to specifically exclude each of the special cases). Then each of the rules would be more complex but somewhat more independent. However, it would be difficult to relate the differences in conclusions based on one special situation versus another. An alternate solution would be to recognize the inherent structure in the segment of knowledge that has been distributed across several rules. A technique used in other symbolic processing approaches [16, 17] is to promote prototypical situations (and their exceptions) as the basic unit of knowledge representation. Information in these systems is often organized around individual diagnoses, and groups together all of the knowledge pertaining to a particular disease. This method has the disadvantage that the size of each of these typical units, known as "frames" or "schemas" [18], can become too large to comprehend. These organizational structures can also be used to provide for a more coherent consultation by supplying a larger context for the question asking mechanism.

We have experimented with another representation for structuring the rule base: the creation of a rule set containing knowledge about the medical knowledge of the system ("meta-knowledge") [14]. These "meta-rules" can be used as "strategy rules" to order the application of rules in the knowledge base. They provide a heuristic mechanism for taking into account the fact that some information may be more relevant for making a specific conclusion and that other rules, although potentially applicable, can likely be ignored.

Another use for a global structure overlaid on the knowledge base would be to provide for anatomical models. Reggia [19] suggests that this would have been useful in the development of a production rule system for neurological localization. Aikins [20] has explored the combination of production rules and frames using the MYCIN methodology for the interpretation of pulmonary function tests.

The designers of future rule-based systems should consider some of the above methods for providing a global structure for the knowledge. Not all rules can be considered independently, and when rules are related the connections should be available for manipulation by the computer.

6.5 *Handling Limited User Input*

In the intensive care unit, the lack of communication is partly solved by the availability of a large mass of on-line computer-processed data. Another approach to solving the communication problem is to display for the clinician conditional conclusions that require clinical observation before being carried out. For example, rather than asking whether a patient is sweating, VM might display a recommendation such as "If the patient is diaphoretic I suggest . . . , otherwise. . . ."

One additional solution to the problem of limited man to machine communication, would be to anticipate the key questions that might be posed by the clinician at the bedside and provide a "menu" of likely questions for exploring the conclusions generated by the program. During the development of part of the meningitis knowledge base the MYCIN program was modified to generate automatically the answers to a few key questions specified in advance by the medical expert. Such a

key question for the ICU setting is "What is the status of ventilatory therapy?" The program, by the evaluation of several of the rules, can produce the following type of explanation: "Before transition to the T-piece can be then suggested, hemodynamic stability must be present, which requires systolic blood pressure to be acceptable, (current systolic blood pressure value is 170)."

7 SUMMARY

Several years of experience with the MYCIN program have led to an understanding of additional requirements for symbolic processing approaches to medical decision making. These include extending the knowledge base beyond the facts necessary for high performance, providing an organizing structure for a large number of production rules, and extending the decision making aids to include assistance throughout the patient's clinical course. For decision aids in the intensive care unit, or other equally dynamic situations, programs cannot depend on interaction with the clinical users. Furthermore, they must handle data that are changing over time, but might be missing or spurious. They must also be able to provide tracking of the patient's status during the course of the underlying disease or in response to therapeutic intervention. A more complete description of the VM program can be found in [21].

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