



Do Not Use Abbreviations

Please note: The policy description, purpose and appendix A are harmonized across the Huron Perth & Area Ontario Health Team Accreditation Collaborative.

Policy

We are committed to safe, quality health care and in maintaining the standards of Accreditation Canada. For this reason, staff and prescribers are cautioned against using abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols in their manual or electronic documentation.

It is the responsibility of all health care professionals to document in a clear manner in the health record to promote safe patient care. The use of abbreviations, acronyms and symbols carries a significant risk of misinterpretation by other caregivers and poses a risk to patients/clients/residents, care providers and health care organizations.

Any medication order that uses any of the abbreviations from **Appendix A: “Do Not Use – Abbreviations”** list will not be processed until the ordering prescriber has been contacted and the orders clarified.

Abbreviations must not be used on Consent Forms, Certificates of Death or when communicating medical information.

“The use of some abbreviations, symbols and dose designations has been identified as an underlying cause of serious, even fatal medication errors. Most errors related to the use of dangerous abbreviations and unclear dose designations have involved handwritten orders or medication administration records” (ISMP Canada 2006)

Purpose

- To undertake joint initiatives to ensure there is a consistent interpretation of written (manual or electronic) information by all members of the health care team
- To reduce the risk of errors by the use and misinterpretation of error prone abbreviations.

- To identify when it is unacceptable or inappropriate to use abbreviations from a legal and risk perspective.

Scope

The policy applies to all staff and prescribers who document on the health record.

Definitions

Abbreviations:

1. A shortened or contracted form of a word or phrase, used to represent the whole.
2. A short phrase or reduced form used to represent a larger, more complex idea, situation, set of beliefs, etc.

Acronym:

1. A word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a set phrase or series of words.
2. Any abbreviation so formed, regardless of pronunciation.

ISMP:

Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada – an independent national not-for-profit organization committed to the advancement of medication safety in all health care settings.

Symbols:

1. A letter, figure, other character, mark or a combination of letters or the like used to designate something.

HPA-OHT Accreditation organizations will include an organization-specific addendum to the harmonized policy to address their respective processes.

Appendix A

Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations	Intended Meaning	Problem	Correction
U	unit	Mistaken for "O", "4" or cc	Write "unit"
IU	international unit	Mistaken for "IV" (intravenous or "10" (ten))	Write "unit"
IN	intranasally	Mistaken for "IV", "IM"	Write "intranasally"
Abbreviations for drug names		Misinterpreted because of similar abbreviations for multiple drugs; i.e. MS, MSO4 (morphine sulphate), MgSO4 (magnesium sulphate) may be confused for one another	Do not abbreviate drug generic names or trade names
QD	Every Day	QD and QOD have been mistaken for each other, or as "qid". The Q had also been misinterpreted as "2" (two)	Write "daily" and "every other day"
QOD	Every other Day		
os	By mouth	Mistaken for "left eye" (OS = Oculus Sinister)	Write "PO" or "by mouth"
qhs, qn	Every night	Mistaken as "every hour"	Write "HS", "hs" or "at bedtime"
OD	Every day	Mistaken for "right eye" (OD = Oculus dexter)	Write "daily"
OS, OD, OU	Left eye, right eye, both eyes	May be confused with one another	Write "left eye", "right eye", "both eyes"
D/C	Discharge	Interpreted as "discontinue whatever medications follow" (typically discharge medications)	Write "discharge"
cc	cubic centimetre	Mistaken for "u" (units)	Write "mL" or "millilitre"
ug	microgram	Mistaken for "mg" (milligram) resulting in one-thousand fold overdose	Write "mcg" or "microgram"
gr	grain	May be confused as apothecary system not widely used or understood	Write "mg"
SC, SQ, subq	subcutaneous	Mistaken for "SL" (sublingual) or "5 every"	Write "subcut" "subcutaneously"
SL	sublingual	Mistaken for "SC" (subcutaneous)	Write "sublingual"
@	at	Mistaken for "2" (two) or "5" (five)	Write "at"
> <	greater than less than	Mistaken for "7" (seven) or the letter "L" May be confused with one another	Write "greater than" Write "less than"
arrow up arrow down	increase decrease	Mistaken for "7" (seven) or the letter "T" May be confused with one another	Write "increase" Write "decrease"
Trailing zero	x.0 mg	Decimal point is overlooked resulting in a 10 fold dose error	Never use a zero by itself after a decimal point. Write "x mg"
Lack of leading zero	.x mg	Decimal point is overlooked resulting in a 10 fold dose error	Always use a zero before a decimal point. Write "0.x mg"

Adapted from:
 1. ISMP's List of Error-Prone Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations 2006
 2. ISMP's Canada DO NO USE Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations 2006
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