TITLE
DO NOT USE LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, SYMBOLS, AND DOSE DESIGNATIONS FOR MEDICATION-RELATED DOCUMENTATION

SCOPE
Provincial

APPROVAL AUTHORITY
Executive Leadership Team

SPONSOR
Health Professions Strategy and Practice

PARENT DOCUMENT TITLE, TYPE AND NUMBER
Not applicable

NOTE: The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the information in this document, please contact the Policy & Forms Department at policy@ahs.ca. The Policy & Forms website is the official source of current approved policies, procedures, directives, standards, protocols and guidelines.

OBJECTIVES

- To facilitate patient safety by eliminating the use of dangerous abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations used in medication-related documentation.

PRINCIPLES

The use of dangerous abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations within all medication-related documentation is a source of preventable medical error.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is committed to identifying and implementing a list of abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations that are deemed to be dangerous and shall not be used in medication-related documentation.

This policy does not apply to laboratory results. Laboratory results need to follow their applicable standards of accreditation.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, Students, Volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).
ELEMENTS

1. **Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations**
   
   1.1 The AHS *Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations* (see Appendix A of this document) applies to all medication-related documentation in the following circumstances:

   a) when handwritten or entered as text into a computer; or

   b) on any pre-printed forms or labels related to medication use.

   1.2 If a dangerous abbreviation, symbol, or dose designation is used in medication-related documentation, the **health care provider** shall clarify with the writer, if necessary.

2. **Responsibility**

   2.1 AHS shall update the *Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations* (see Appendix A of this document) at an interval not to exceed three (3) years, and:

   a) educate health care providers, including medical and midwifery staffs at orientation and when changes are made; and

   b) implement any necessary changes to organizational processes as indicated by regular compliance audits.

3. **Electronic Health Records**

   3.1 Dangerous abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations may only be used in an electronic health information system that is incapable of supporting the use of the full terminology due to character restrictions.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Health care provider** means any person who provides goods or services to a patient, inclusive of health care professionals, staff, students, volunteers and other persons acting on behalf of or in conjunction with Alberta Health Services.

**Laboratory results** means the value and/or interpretation generated from the analysis of a laboratory sample.

**Medication-related documentation** means those portions of clinical documentation that contain medication names/symbols/dosages or other medication information. It can occur in, but is not limited to, the following:

- medication orders;
- progress notes;
• discharge summaries;
• medication administration records;
• labels;
• pre-printed or computerized orders or order sets;
• protocols, standards, or guidelines;
• consultation reports; and
• operative reports.

**Patient** means an adult or child who receives or has requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers or individuals authorized to act on behalf of Alberta Health Services. This term is inclusive of residents, clients and outpatients.

**REFERENCES**

- Appendix A: *Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations*
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
  - *Do Not Use Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations List* (Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada)
  - *Major Laboratory Standards & Guidelines* (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta)
  - *Required Organizational Practice: The “Do Not Use” List of Abbreviations* (Accreditation Canada)

**VERSION HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 03, 2016</td>
<td>Revised: includes change in title from &quot;Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols &amp; Dose Designations&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 03, 2016</td>
<td>Revised: Effective Date updated in header</td>
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Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Intended Meaning</th>
<th>Problem/Do Not Use</th>
<th>Correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>unit</td>
<td>Mistaken for “0” (zero), “4” (four), or cc</td>
<td>Use “unit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>international unit</td>
<td>Mistaken for “IV” (intravenous) or “10” (ten)</td>
<td>Use “unit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QD</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>QD and QOD have been mistaken for each other, or as ‘qid’. The Q has also been misinterpreted as “2” (two).</td>
<td>Use “daily” and “every other day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QOD</td>
<td>Every other day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OD</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>Mistaken for “right eye” (OD = oculus dexter)</td>
<td>Use “daily”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS, OD, OU</td>
<td>Left eye, right eye, both eyes</td>
<td>May be confused with one another</td>
<td>Use “left eye”, “right eye” or “both eyes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D/C</td>
<td>Discharge or Discontinue</td>
<td>Interpreted as “discontinue whatever medications follow” (typically discharge medications)</td>
<td>Use “discharge” or “discontinue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cc</td>
<td>cubic centimetre</td>
<td>Mistaken for “u” (units)</td>
<td>Use “mL” or “millilitre”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>µg</td>
<td>microgram</td>
<td>Mistaken for “mg” (milligram) resulting in one thousand-fold overdose</td>
<td>Use “mcg” or “microgram”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Intended Meaning</th>
<th>Problem/Do Not Use</th>
<th>Correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@</td>
<td>at</td>
<td>Mistaken for “2” (two) or “5” (five)</td>
<td>Use “at”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>Greater than</td>
<td>Mistaken for “7” (seven) or the letter “L”, confused with each other</td>
<td>Use “greater than”/“more than” or “less than”/“lower than”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>Less than</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥</td>
<td>Greater than or equal to</td>
<td>As above for greater than and less than</td>
<td>Use “greater/more than or equal to” or “less/lower than or equal to”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤</td>
<td>Less than or equal to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviations for drug names**

Misinterpreted because of similar abbreviations for multiple drugs; e.g., MS, MSO₄ (morphine sulphate), MgSO₄ (magnesium sulphate) may be confused for one another

Do not abbreviate drug names

**Dose Designation**

- **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. Use “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. Use “0.X mg”

Adapted from ISMP Canada’s *Do Not Use Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations, 2006*