



TITLE

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

SCOPE

Provincial

DOCUMENT #

PS-08

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Executive Leadership Team

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October 11, 2011

SPONSOR

Health Professions Strategy and Practice

REVISION EFFECTIVE DATE

October 3, 2016

PARENT DOCUMENT TITLE, TYPE AND NUMBER

Not applicable

SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE

October 03, 2019

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;

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- 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

Date	Action Taken
October 03, 2016	Revised: includes change in title from “Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols & Dose Designations”
October 03, 2016	Revised: Effective Date updated in header

APPENDIX A

Do Not Use List of Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations

Abbreviation	Intended Meaning	Problem/Do Not Use	Correction
U	unit	Mistaken for "0" (zero), "4" (four), or cc	Use "unit"
IU	international unit	Mistaken for "IV" (intravenous) or "10" (ten)	Use "unit"
Abbreviations for drug names		Misinterpreted because of similar abbreviations for multiple drugs; e.g., MS, MSO ₄ (morphine sulphate), MgSO ₄ (magnesium sulphate) may be confused for one another	Do not abbreviate drug names
QD QOD	Every day Every other day	QD and QOD have been mistaken for each other, or as 'qid'. The Q has also been misinterpreted as "2" (two).	Use "daily" and "every other day"
OD	Every day	Mistaken for "right eye" (OD = oculus dexter)	Use "daily"
OS, OD, OU	Left eye, right eye, both eyes	May be confused with one another	Use "left eye", "right eye" or "both eyes"
D/C	Discharge or Discontinue	Interpreted as "discontinue whatever medications follow" (typically discharge medications)	Use "discharge" or "discontinue"
cc	cubic centimetre	Mistaken for "u" (units)	Use "mL" or "millilitre"
µg	microgram	Mistaken for "mg" (milligram) resulting in one thousand-fold overdose	Use "mcg" or "microgram"
Symbol	Intended Meaning	Problem/Do Not Use	Correction
@	at	Mistaken for "2" (two) or "5" (five)	Use "at"
> <	Greater than Less than	Mistaken for "7" (seven) or the letter "L", confused with each other	Use "greater than"/"more than" or "less than"/"lower than"
≥ ≤	Greater than or equal to Less than or equal to	As above for greater than and less than	Use "greater/more than or equal to" or "less/lower than or equal to"
Dose Designation	Intended Meaning	Problem/Do Not Use	Correction
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