## Do Not Use

### Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations

The abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations found in this table have been reported as being frequently misinterpreted and involved in harmful medication errors. They should NEVER be used when communicating medication information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Intended Meaning</th>
<th>Problem</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>
</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.

- 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
Interpreted as “discontinue whatever medications follow” (typically discharge medications).

Use “discharge”.

**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”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Intended Meaning</th>
<th>Potential Problem</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>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dose Designation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Meaning</th>
<th>Potential Problem</th>
<th>Correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trailing zero</td>
<td>Decimal point is overlooked resulting in 10-fold dose error.</td>
<td>Never use a zero by itself after a decimal point. Use “X mg”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of leading zero</td>
<td>Decimal point is overlooked resulting in 10-fold dose error.</td>
<td>Always use a zero before a decimal point. Use “0.X mg”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from ISMP’s List of Error-Prone Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations 2006*

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**Report actual and potential medication errors to ISMP Canada** via the web at https://www.ismp-canada.org/err_report.htm or by calling 1-866-54-ISMPC. ISMP Canada guarantees confidentiality of information received and respects the reporter’s wishes as to the level of detail included in publications.

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