

Notations Most Commonly Associated With Misinterpretation and Patient Harm

Do not use these dangerous abbreviations or dose designations

| Abbreviation/ Dose Expression | Intended Meaning | Misinterpretation | Correction |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Apothecary symbols | dram minim | Misunderstood or misread (symbol for dram misread for "3" and minim misread as "mL"). | Use the metric system. |
| AU | aurio uterque (each ear) | Mistaken for OU (oculo uterque—each eye). | Don't use this abbreviation. |
| D/C | discharge discontinue | Premature discontinuation of medications when D/C (intended to mean "discharge") has been misinterpreted as "discontinued" when followed by a list of drugs. | Use "discharge" and "discontinue." |
| Drug names | | | Use the complete spelling for drug names. |
| ARA-A | Vidarabine | cytarabine (ARA-C) | |
| AZT | zidovudine (Retrovir) | azathioprine | |
| CPZ | Compazine (prochlorperazine) | chlorpromazine | |
| DPT | Demerol-Phenergan- Thorazine | diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (vaccine) | |
| HCl | hydrochloric acid | potassium chloride (The "H" is misinterpreted as "K.") | |
| HCT | hydrocortisone | hydrochlorothiazide | |
| HCTZ | hydrochlorothiazide | hydrocortisone (seen as HCT250 mg) | |
| MgSO ₄ | magnesium sulfate | morphine sulfate | |
| MSO ₄ | morphine sulfate | magnesium sulfate | |
| MTX | methotrexate | mitoxantrone | |
| TAC | triamcinolone | tetracaine, Adrenalin, cocaine | |
| ZnSO ₄ | zinc sulfate | morphine sulfate | |
| Stemmed names | | | |
| "Nitro" drip | nitroglycerin infusion | sodium nitroprusside infusion | |
| "Norflox" | norfloxacin | Norfex (orphenadrine) | |
| μ | microgram | Mistaken for "mg" when handwritten. | Use "mcg." |
| o.d. or OD | once daily | Misinterpreted as "right eye" (OD—oculus dexter) and administration of oral medications in the eye. | Use "daily." |
| TIW or tiw | three times a week | Mistaken as "three times a day." | Don't use this abbreviation. |
| Per os | orally | The "os" can be mistaken for "left eye." | Use "PO," "by mouth," or "orally." |
| q.d. or QD | every day | Mistaken as q.i.d (four times daily), especially if the period after the "q" or the tail of the "q" is misunderstood as an "i." | Use "daily" or "every day." |
| Qn | nightly or at bedtime | Misinterpreted as "qh" (every hour). | Use "nightly." |

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| Qhs | nightly at bedtime | Misread as every hour. | Use "nightly." |
| q6PM, etc. | every evening at 6 PM | Misread as every six hours. | Use 6 PM "nightly." |
| q.o.d. or QOD | every other day | Misinterpreted as q.d. (daily) or q.i.d. if the "o" is poorly written. | Use "every other day." |
| Sub q | subcutaneous | The "q" has been mistaken for "every" (e.g., one heparin dose ordered "sub q 2 hours before surgery" misunderstood as every 2 hours before surgery). | Use "subcut." or write "subcutaneous." |
| SC | Subcutaneous | Mistaken for SL (sublingual). | Use "subcut." or write "subcutaneous." |
| U or u | unit | Read as a zero (0) or a four (4), causing a 10-fold overdose or greater (4U seen as "40" or 4u seen as 44"). | "Unit" has no acceptable abbreviation. Use "unit." |
| IU | international unit | Misread as IV (intravenous). | Use "units." |
| Cc | cubic centimeters | Misread as "U" (units). | Use "mL." |
| x3d | for three days | Mistaken for "three doses." | Use "for three days." |
| BT | bedtime | Mistaken as "BID" (twice daily). | Use "hs." |
| Ss | sliding scale (insulin) or ½ (apothecary) | Mistaken for "55." | Spell out "sliding scale." Use "one-half" or use "½." |
| > and < | greater than and less than | Mistakenly used opposite of intended. | Use "greater than" or "less than." |
| / (slash mark) | separates two doses or indicates "per" | Misunderstood as the number 1 ("25 unit/10 units" read as "110" units). | Do not use a slash mark to separate doses. Use "per." |
| Name letters and dose numbers run together (e.g., Inderal40 mg) | Inderal 40 mg | Misread as Inderal 140 mg. | Always use space between drug name, dose and unit of measure. |
| Zero after decimal point (1.0) | 1 mg | Misread as 10 mg if the decimal point is not seen. | Do not use terminal zeros for doses expressed in whole numbers. |
| No zero before decimal dose (.5 mg) | 0.5 mg | Misread as 5 mg. | Always use zero before a decimal when the dose is less than a whole unit. |

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