

Title: Prohibited Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations

Approver: CNO, CMO, Medical Staff President, Director of Pharmacy

Initiated: 1/2004 (see archived policy for previous review and revision dates)

Last Approval Date: 11/2017

References: ISMP Error-Prone Abbreviations, Symbols, and Dose Designations

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**1.0 DEFINITIONS: N/A**

**2.0 POLICY:**

- 2.1 Abbreviations in the medical record can lead to medication and other patient care errors. In general abbreviations should be avoided and used minimally in order to provide clear communication throughout patient care.
- 2.2 The official “Do Not Use” list of abbreviations published by The Joint Commission and a list of “Not Recommended Abbreviations and Symbols” will be posted in prominent areas in each patient care area, in the Medical Staff Office, Medical Affairs Office, Medical Library, Medical Records Department, and in the Physician Lounge.
  - 2.2.1 All physicians/LIPs and staff who document in the medical record will cease using abbreviations and symbols defined on the posted lists.
- 2.3 Whenever an abbreviation or any documentation in the medical record is unclear and the recipient of the questionable abbreviation, symbol, or documentation is unsure of how to act for patient care, the practitioner will be called to clarify the documentation/medication order.
- 2.4 Whenever an unacceptable abbreviation is used for an order, the author of the order will be called, clarification sought, and documentation will be made about the intended use of the unacceptable abbreviation. A Pharmacist, Registered Nurse or Respiratory Therapist can make this call and the correction will be documented in the medical record as a telephone order/clarification.

**The following is the official Joint Commission “Do Not Use List” of abbreviations (2011-2013)**

<b>Official “Do Not Use” List</b>	<i>Potential Problem</i>	<b>Use Instead</b>
<b>Do Not Use</b> U, u (unit)	Mistaken for “0” (zero), the number “4” (four) or “cc”	Write "unit"
IU (International Unit)	Mistaken for IV (intravenous) or the number 10 (ten)	Write "International Unit"
Q.D., QD, q.d., qd (daily)	Mistaken for each other	Write "daily"
Q.O.D., QOD, q.o.d, qod (every other day)	Period after the Q mistaken for "I" and the "O" mistaken for "I"	Write "every other day"
Trailing zero (X.0 mg)*	Decimal point is missed	Write X mg
Lack of leading zero (.X mg)		Write 0.X mg
MS	Can mean morphine sulfate or magnesium sulfate	Write "morphine sulfate"
MSO4 and MgSO4	Confused for one another	Write "magnesium sulfate"

These prohibited abbreviations apply to all orders and all medication-related documentation that is handwritten (including free-text computer entry) or on pre-printed forms.

A “trailing zero” may be used only where required to demonstrate the level of precision of the value being reported, such as for laboratory results, imaging studies that report size of lesions, or catheter/tube sizes. It may not be used in medication orders or other medication-related documentation.

**The following info is excerpted from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) list of “Not Recommended” abbreviations and symbols which lead to potential errors associated with use. The full list can be found as an attachment to this policy.**

**Abbreviations not recommended**

AD and OD  
AS and OS  
AU and OU

**Use instead**

Write “Right ear or Right eye”  
Write “Left ear or Left eye”  
Write “Both ears or Both eyes”

**Symbols not recommended**

µg  
x3d  
>and<  
(slash mark)  
@  
+  
o  
&  
Ø

**Use instead**

Write “mcg”  
Write “for 3 days”  
Write “greater than” or “less than”  
Write “per”  
Write “at”  
Write “plus”  
Write “hour”  
Write “and”  
Do not use this “null” sign.

**Never abbreviate or use “stem” words for medications**

“Nitro”  
“IV Vanc”

**Write out the entire drug name**

Nitroglycerin  
Intravenous Vancomycin