Abbreviations and Acronyms in Clinical Documentation – Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs

A guide for mental health, alcohol and other drugs service clinicians to promote patient safety and improve the quality of patient records

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# Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

* Ensure mental health (MH) and alcohol and other drug (AOD) clinicians maintain a consistent and broad understanding of accepted abbreviations utilised within MH and AOD services;
* Ensure Health records and documentation can be accurately interpreted over time by those giving and receiving information and instruction regarding patient care;
* Minimise the risks associated with the use of abbreviations, symbols, abbreviated medication dose designations and acronyms used in the clinical health setting;
* Promote patient safety; and
* Eliminate the use of unsafe abbreviations.

# Responsibilities

All clinicians have a responsibility to ensure they comply with this policy.

Managers are required to ensure that all clinicians are aware of and apply this policy.

# All documentation

Only approved abbreviations, acronyms and symbols can be used in all clinical documentation processes.

Use plain English, do not use jargon.

Write in full – avoid using abbreviations wherever possible.

Note capital letters, lower case lettering, full stops and slashes, as these are important in the interpretation of the abbreviations.

All written documentation, including prescriptions must be written in black ink.

# Medication prescribing and documentation

The use of inconsistent, ambiguous or non-standard abbreviations and terminology in the prescribing of medicines is a major cause of medication errors. Standardisation of terminology and abbreviations has been identified as an important strategy in reducing these errors. Australian standardised terminology, abbreviations and symbols have been developed. Please refer to the [Recommendations for terminology, abbreviations and symbols used in medicines documentation](https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Recommendations-for-terminology-abbreviations-and-symbols-used-in-medicines-December-2016.pdf), prepared by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare and adopted by the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council.

# Principles for consistent prescribing terminology

* All written documentation, including prescriptions **MUST** be written in black ink.
* Use plain English – avoid jargon.
* Write in full – avoid using abbreviations wherever possible, including Latin abbreviations
* Print all text – especially drug names.
* Use generic drug names. Exception may be made for combination products, but only if the trade name adequately identifies the medication being prescribed. Exception may also be made where significant bioavailability issues between brands exists eg. cyclosporine.
* Write drug names in full. **NEVER** abbreviate **ANY** drug name. Some examples of *unacceptable* drug name abbreviations are: G-CSF (use filgrastim or pegfilgrastim), 5-FU (use fluorouracil), EPO (use epoetin).
* For slow release, controlled release, or other modified release products, the description used in the trade name to denote the release characteristics should be included with the generic drug name, for example tramadol **SR,** carbamazepine **CR,** metformin **XR.**
* For multi-drug protocols, prescribe each drug in full and do not use acronyms, for example do not prescribe chemotherapy as ‘CHOP’. Prescribe each drug separately.
* Do not use chemical names/symbols. Eg. HCl (hydrochloric acid or hydrochloride) may be mistaken for KCl (potassium chloride).
* Use words or Hindu-Arabic numbers i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc. Do not use roman numerals i.e. ii for two, iii for three etc.
* Use metric units such as gram or mL
* Use a leading zero in front of a decimal point for a dose less than 1 e.g. use 0.5 not .5.
* Do not use trailing zeros e.g. use 5 not 5.0
* For oral liquid preparations, express dose in weight as well as volume e.g. for morphine oral solution 5mg/mL prescribe the dose in mg and confirm the volume in brackets 10mg (2mL).
* For oral liquid preparations, express dose in weight as well as volume e.g. for morphine oral solution 5mg/mL prescribe the dose in mg and confirm the volume in brackets 10mg (2mL).
* Express dosage frequency unambiguously e.g. use ‘three times a week’ not ‘three times weekly’ as the latter could be confused as ‘every three weeks’.
* Avoid fractions e.g. 1/7 could be interpreted as ‘for one day’, ‘once daily’, ‘for one week’, or ‘once weekly’; 1/2 could be interpreted as ‘half’ or as ‘one to two’.
* Do not use symbols
* Avoid acronyms or abbreviations for medical terms and procedure names on orders or prescriptions e.g. avoid EBM meaning ‘expressed breast milk’.

# List of approved abbreviations and acronyms

## Names of roles

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **AMHW** | Aboriginal Mental Health Worker |
| **APP** | Approved Psychiatric Practitioner |
| **CN** | Clinical Nurse |
| **CV** | Community Visitor |
| **BDR** | Banned Drinker Register |
| **CAG** | Consumer Advisory Group |
| **CNC** | Clinical Nurse Consultant |
| **CNE** | Clinical Nurse Educator |
| **CNS** | Clinical Nurse Specialist |
| **CNM** | Clinical Nurse Manager |
| **DMHP** | Designated Mental Health Practitioner |
| **DMO** | District Medical Officer |
| **Dr** | Doctor |
| **EN** | Enrolled Nurse |
| **GP** | General Practitioner |
| **NP** | Nurse Practitioner |
| **OT** | Occupational Therapist/Therapy |
| **RMO** | Resident Medical Officer |
| **RN** | Registered Nurse |
| **SAC** | Senior Assessment Clinician |
| **STC** | Senior Treatment Clinician |
| **SW** | Social Worker |
| **Reg** | Registrar (Medical Officer) |

## Locations, teams and programs

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **ADSCA** | Alcohol and other Drug Services Central Australia |
| **AOD** | Alcohol and Other Drugs |
| **ASH** | Alice Springs Hospital |
| **BMHS** | Barkly Mental Health Service |
| **CVP** | Community Visitor Program |
| **CAHS** | Central Australia Health Service |
| **DRMHT** | Darwin Remote Mental Health Team |
| **EAMHT** | East Arnhem Mental Health Team |
| **ED** | Emergency Department |
| **GDH** | Gove District Hospital |
| **IWAS** | Integrated Withdrawal and Assessment Service |
| **JRU** | Joan Ridley Unit |
| **KDH** | Katherine District Hospital |
| **KMHT** | Katherine Mental Health Team |
| **MHAT** | Mental Health Access Team |
| **MH CAHS** | Mental Health Central Australia Health Service |
| **OPD** | Outpatient Department |
| **OPP** | Opiate Pharmacotherapy Program |
| **RAPU** | Rapid Admission and Planning Unit |
| **RDH** | Royal Darwin Hospital |
| **TCDH** | Tennant Creek District Hospital |
| **TEHS** | Top End Health Service |
| **TEMHS** | Top End Mental Health Service |
| **TEAMhealth** | Top End Association for Mental Health |
| **YIP** | Youth Inpatient Program |

## Key non-government organisations

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **AADANT** | Association of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies Northern Territory |
| **AIMS** | Aboriginal and Islander Medical Service |
| **AMSANT** | Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory |
| **BRADAAG** | Barkly Region Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group |
| **CAAAPU** | Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit |
| **CAAC** | Central Australian Aboriginal Congress |
| **CAAPS** | Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services |
| **DASA** | Drug and Alcohol Services Australia |
| **FORWAARD** | Foundation of Rehabilitation With Aboriginal Alcohol Related Difficulties |

## Measures and symbols

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **oC** | Degree celsius |
| **cc / cm3 / cm3** | Cubic centimetre |
| **cm** | Centimetre |
| **g** | Gram |
| **kcal** | Kilocalorie |
| **kg** | Kilogram |
| **kJ** | Kilojoule |
| **L** | Litre |
| **m** | Metre |
| **mg** | Milligram |
| **mJ** | Megajoule |
| **mL** | Millilitre |
| **mm** | Millimetre |
| **mmol** | Millimole |
| **pH** | Hydrogen ion concentration |
| *Note: Microgram is not to be abbreviated; Units (eg Insulin) are not to be abbreviated* | |

## Observations

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **BAL** | Blood alcohol level |
| **BP** | Blood pressure |
| **CWMS** | Colour, warmth, movement, sensation |
| **HR** | Heart rate |
| **Ht** | Height |
| **Neuro Obs** | Neurological observations |
| **Obs** | Observations |
| **O2sats** | Oxygen saturation |
| **SG** | Specific gravity |
| **TPR** | Temperature, pulse, respirations |
| **U/A** | Urinalysis |
| **Wt** | Weight |

## Pathology Investigations

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **Alb** | Albumin |
| **ALP** | Alkaline Phosphtase |
| **ALT** | Alanine Amino Transferase |
| **anti-HBs** | Hepatitis B antibody; post |
| **anti-HBe** | Hepatitis B e antibody |
| **BAL** | Blood alcohol level |
| **Beta HCG** | Human chorionic gonadotropin |
| **Bili** | Bilirubin |
| **BSL** | Blood sugar level |
| **BGL** | Blood glucose level |
| **Cl** | Chloride |
| **CMP** | Calcium magnesium and phosphate |
| **Creat** | Creatinine |
| **CRP** | C-reactive protein |
| **CSF** | Cerebrospinal fluid |
| **ESR** | Erythrocyte sedimentation rate |
| **eGFR** | Estimated glomerular filtration rate |
| **EtOH** | Alcohol |
| **FBC** | Full blood count |
| **FBE** | Full blood examination |
| **GTT** | Glucose Tolerance Test |
| **GGT** | Glutamyl Transpeptidase |
| **HAV IgM** | Hepatitis A (IgM) |
| **Hb** | Haemoglobin |
| **HbA1c** | Glycosylated haemoglobin |
| **HBsAb** | Hepatitis B antibody; post |
| **HBV sAg** | Hepatitis B antigen |
| **HBsAg** | Hepatitis B antigen |
| **HBV eAg** | Hepatitis B e antigen. |
| **HBeAg** | Hepatitis B e antigen. |
| **HBV eAb** | Hepatitis B e antibody |
| **HCO3** | Bicarbonate |
| **HCV** | Hepatitis C antibody |
| **HDL** | High density lipids |
| **HIV** | Human Immunodeficiency Virus (antibody) |
| **HIV VL** | Human immunodeficiency viral load |
| **K** | Potassium |
| **LDL** | Low density lipids |
| **LFT** | Liver Function Test |
| **Li** | Lithium |
| **Lipids** | Cholesterol LDL, HDL and Trigs |
| **Na** | Sodium |
| **NC** | Neutrophil count |
| **Prot** | Protein |
| **RBC** | Red blood corpuscles (No nucleus so they’re not cells) |
| **TB or AFB** | Acid fast bacilli culture/Examination for mycobacterium tuberculosis |
| **TFT** | Thyroid function tests |
| **Trigs** | Triglycerides |
| **TP** | Total protein |
| **TSH** | Thyroid stimulating hormone |
| **UDS** | Urine drug screen |
| **UEC** | Urea, electrolytes and creatinine |
| **UPROT** | Urinary protein |
| **WBC** | White blood cell |
| **WCC** | White cell count |

## Pharmacology Administration

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **BD** | Twice a day |
| **daily** | One time per day |
| **IM** | Intramuscular (injection) |
| **IV** | Intravenous (injection/infusion) |
| **mane** | Morning |
| **midday** | Midday |
| **mix** | Mixture |
| **neb** | Nebuliser |
| **nocte** | Night |
| **O or PO** | Oral (per os) |
| **prn** | As necessary (pro re nata) |
| **QID** | Four times per day (quater in die) |
| **SubCut** | Subcutaneous |
| **SubLing** | Sublingual |
| **Stat** | Immediately (statim) |
| **TDS** | Three times per day (ter in die) |

## Substances

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **ATS** | Amphetamine type stimulant |
| **BZD** | Benzodiazepines |
| **EtOH** | Alcohol (ethanol) |
| **NRT** | Nicotine replacement therapy |
| **OP** | Opiates/opioids |
| **THC** | Marijuana/cannabis |
| **VSA** | Volatile substance abuse |
| **VSU** | Volatile substance use |

## AOD Withdrawal Scales

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **AWS** | Alcohol Withdrawal Scale (Remote Health) |
| **CIWA-ar** | Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment of Alcohol Scale – revised |
| **COWS** | Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale |

## Familial abbreviations

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **Bro** | Brother |
| **Dau** | Daughter |
| **Fa** | Father |
| **Mo** | Mother |
| **Sis** | Sister |
| **Son** | Son |

## Miscellaneous and noting

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **A/A** | As above |
| **ADL** | Activities of daily living |
| **ASAP** | As soon as possible |
| **AWOL** | Absent without leave |
| **Ax** | Assessment |
| **BIBA** | Brought in by Ambulance |
| **BIBP** | Brought in by Police |
| **BSL/BGL** | Blood sugar level/Blood glucose level |
| **C/A** | Clinical assessment |
| **CPR** | Cardiopulmonary resuscitation |
| **CQI** | Continuous quality improvement |
| **d/c** | Discharge |
| **DOA** | Dead on arrival |
| **DDx** | Differential diagnosis |
| **DNA** | Did not attend |
| **DOB** | Date of birth |
| **DV** | Domestic violence |
| **DVO** | Domestic violence order |
| **Dx** | Diagnosis |
| **ECG** | Electrocardiogram |
| **FAS** | Foetal alcohol syndrome |
| **FASD** | Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder |
| **FBC** | Fluid balance chart |
| **FHx** | Family history |
| **FV** | Family violence |
| **HRN** | Health/hospital registration number |
| **H/V** | Home visit |
| **Hx** | History |
| **LAMA** | Left against medical advice |
| **Meds** | Medications |
| **MVA** | Motor vehicle accident |
| **N/A** | Not applicable |
| **NAD** | No abnormalities detected |
| **NBM** | Nil by mouth |
| **NCP** | Nursing Care Plan |
| **NESB** | Non-English speaking background |
| **NFA** | No fixed abode/addess |
| **NFR** | Not for resuscitation |
| **NOK** | Next of kin |
| **O/A** | On admission |
| **O/E** | On examination |
| **PHx** | Past history |
| **R/V** | Review |
| **Rx** | Treatment/Therapy |
| **TC** | Telephone call |
| **TOL** | Took own leave |

## Diseases/conditions

| Acronyms | Full form |
| --- | --- |
| **ABI** | Acquired brain injury |
| **ARBI** | Alcohol required brain injury |
| **AIDS** | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome |
| **ALD** | Alcoholic Liver Disease |
| **ARF** | Acute renal failure |
| **BI** | Brain injury |
| **CCF** | Congestive cardiac failure |
| **COAD** | Chronic Obstructive Airways Disease |
| **DT’s** | Delirium tremens |
| **D & V** | Diarrhoea and vomiting |
| **IHD** | Ischaemic Heart Disease |
| **LOC** | Loss of consciousness |
| **(A) MI** | (Acute) myocardial infarction |
| **MRSA** | Multi-resistant staphylococcus Aureus |
| **RDS** | Respiratory Distress Syndrome |
| **PE** | Pulmonary embolism |
| **PVD** | Peripheral Vascular Disease |
| **SARS** | Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome |
| **STD** | Sexually transmitted disease |
| **T1DM** | Diabetes Mellitus type one (Do not use Roman numerals) |
| **T2DM** | Diabetes Mellitus type two (Do not use Roman numerals) |
| **TB** | Tuberculosis |
| **TIA** | Transient ischaemic attack |
| **TBI** | Traumatic brain injury |
| **URTI** | Upper respiratory tract infection |
| **UTI** | Urinary tract infection |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Quality Assurance | | |
|  | **Method** | **Responsibility** |
| **Implementation** | Document will be placed on PGC and the internet and relevant staff and relevant non-government organisations will be advised of this via email.  New NT Health employees will be advised of this document upon commencement | Senior Policy Officer - Quality and Business Systems  Unit Managers |
| **Review** | This document will be reviewed within 4 years, or as required. | Senior Director Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs DoH |
| **Evaluation** | Evaluation of document will be informal and ongoing | Senior Director Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs DoH |
| **Compliance** | Incidents associated with errors owing to use of non-approved or approved abbreviations must be reported and managed through the RiskMan system | Unit Managers |