



Selected Research Documenting the Problems with Abbreviation Use

Focus	Description	Findings	Reference
Acute Care	Review of medication errors reported by hospitals to a centralized reporting service in the United States between 2004 and 2006.	Abbreviations were a contributing factor in 5 per cent of all reported errors. Problematic medication name abbreviations and dose expressions were identified.	12
	Audit of the use of error-prone abbreviations and illegibility of handwritten prescriptions.	Of handwritten prescriptions, 27 per cent contained error-prone abbreviations and 17 per cent were illegible.	29
	Audit of abbreviation use in medication records and medication orders in three Australian hospitals.	Over 75 per cent of patients had one or more abbreviations in their medication record. 8.4 per cent of medication orders contained error-prone abbreviations and nearly 30 per cent of these abbreviations had the potential to cause significant harm.	13
Community	Effectiveness of CPOE in reducing errors in a medical clinic.	CPOE reduced the use of inappropriate abbreviations by 94 per cent and illegible orders by 97 per cent.	41
	Effectiveness of CPOE in reducing illegible orders and use of inappropriate abbreviations in medication orders.	Rate of illegible orders and orders with inappropriate abbreviations fell from 12.7 to 0.04 per 100 prescriptions.	42
	Audit of prescribing errors and use of error-prone abbreviations in handwritten prescriptions.	The error rate was 36.7 per 100 prescriptions. Error-prone abbreviations occurred at a rate of 13.1 per 100 prescriptions.	14



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Community	Use of error-prone abbreviations in outpatient medication orders.	43 per cent of orders had at least one abbreviation and 27 per cent of these were shortened medication names. 61 per cent of handwritten prescriptions contained abbreviations compared with only 11 per cent of electronic prescriptions.	65
Health Disciplines	Home care aides' understanding of abbreviations related to medication administration.	53 per cent could correctly interpret six abbreviations related to the timing and amount of medication to administer	8
	Contribution of abbreviation use by different health professionals to medication errors.	Abbreviation use by medical staff, nurses and pharmacists contributed to medication errors. The pattern of abbreviations implicated in medication errors differed between healthcare professionals.	13
	Analysis of dental prescriptions in primary healthcare units in Brazil.	98.3 per cent of prescriptions contained abbreviations.	87
	Understanding of commonly used medical abbreviations by healthcare providers.	The majority of physicians, nurses and other health care professionals have limited understanding of common medical abbreviations. Recommendations included having a standard list of acceptable abbreviations and a list of "Do not use" abbreviations.	6



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References

Note: Take from the reference list for the Abbreviations Toolkit.

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