

USING TALL MAN LETTERING TO REDUCE LOOK-ALIKE, SOUND-ALIKE ERRORS

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

Medicine name confusion contributes to thousands of medication errors each year,¹ some causing significant patient harm.²

Look-alike, sound-alike (LASA) errors occur when two medications are confused due to similarities in the way their names look, or sound.

The risks associated with LASA medicines can be reduced through the application of Tall Man Lettering. Tall Man Lettering uses a combination of lower and upper case letters to highlight the differences between look-alike medicine names, helping to make them more easily distinguishable (see examples in Table 1).

The Clinical Excellence Commission (CEC) and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) recognise the risk to patient safety that LASA errors may pose, and support the use of Tall Man Lettering as part of a multi-faceted approach to reduce the risks associated with confusable medicine names.³

The ACSQHC has published a *National list of Australian medicines names with Tall Man applied*. This list has been compiled to include LASA medicine names that have been predicted to pose the greatest risk to patient safety.³

To reduce the risk of medicine selection errors by health professionals during the dispensing and administration process, pharmacy dispensing and labelling software should support the application of Tall Man Lettering i.e. Tall Man Lettering is applied to the Hospital Pharmacy Product List (HPPL) or other pharmacy dispensing drug lists.

Table 1: Examples of Application of Tall Man Lettering with Look-alike, Sound-alike Medicine Names⁶

amIODAROne

amLODIPIne

coUMADIN

coVERSYL

nEURONtin

nOROXin

valAciclovir

valGANciclovir

Pharmacy and nursing staff will be the primary clinicians exposed to Tall Man Lettering. All staff exposed to Tall Man Lettering should be provided with education and training on its purpose and benefits before interacting with supported software and/or labels.

Areas in the medicine selection process where Tall Man Lettering should be applied include:

- On-screen display of medicines during dispensing
- Shelf medicine labelling in dispensaries
- Shelf medicine labelling in ward imprest areas
- Inpatient medicine labels.

Only confusable medicines in the HPPL with the greatest potential to cause patient harm (i.e. those included in the ACSQHC *National list of Australian medicines names with Tall Man applied*) should have Tall Man Lettering applied.

The HPPL will be updated to incorporate Tall Man Lettering in 2015. Local health districts not using the HPPL should incorporate Tall Man Lettering into their pharmacy dispensing drug lists. Local health districts will be responsible for establishing label configuration and ensuring Tall Man Lettering is applied appropriately.

Resources and tools to assist in the implementation of Tall Man Lettering, including education materials, will be made available on the Clinical Excellence Commission's Medication Safety and Quality web page.

Tall Man Lettering has only been tested for use within the inpatient setting. It has not been tested for handwriting or for printed labels intended for patients e.g. discharge or outpatient medicine labels.

For further information contact:

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References

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2. Hoffman JM, Proulx SM. Drug Safety. 2003;26(7):445-52.
3. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality 2011. *National Standard for the application of Tall Man Lettering: Project Report*, ACSQHC, Sydney.