

Recommendations for Terminology, Abbreviations and Symbols used in the Prescribing and Administration of Medicines

Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: Is it acceptable to use the ⊙ (circle with a dot) symbol when prescribing?

The 'O' in this symbol is derived from the Latin word 'octarius' which means 'a pint'. This symbol has been used to denote unit or pint and is still used for prescribing units of packed red blood cells.

There has also been a report ¹ of a patient in a major Australian teaching inadvertently receiving 40 units instead of 4 units of insulin because the prescriber used this symbol to denote 'units' and the nurse and pharmacist interpreted the order as 40 units of insulin.

The use of this symbol is strongly discouraged in all circumstances, whether used for the prescribing of blood products, or, as in this instance, the prescribing of insulin.

(Refer to Principles 2 and 9 for consistent prescribing terminology of the Safer Medicines Group's 'Recommendations for Terminology, Abbreviations and Symbols used in the Prescribing and Administration of Medicines')

Reference:

Medication Safety – Australian Alert 42. Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research. 2005;35(4):305