

# Medication Safety Alert

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## Focus on ... Complete Medication Orders

A medication order is one of the most important therapeutic transactions between a prescriber, patient and the rest of the professionals on the care team. Throughout history, a medication order has remained one of the most consequential written and oral communications between humans. A single error in any portion of an order can have serious or grave consequences.

To avoid serious effects of medication errors to a patient through misinterpretation, the prescriber, nurse and pharmacist must provide the highest level of professional safety measures. Safety begins with a complete order when writing, transcribing or entering data into a computer.

### Elements of a Complete Medication Order, written or electronic format

- Legibility, clarity, and size
- **Patient full name and location**
- **Medication Name:** Use the generic **name of the drug** for medications containing a single ingredient, if possible
  - Do not abbreviate medication names
  - The brand name may be used when a medication formulation contains more than one ingredient, such as Dyazide®
  - Be sure to use the drug name suffix to identify a modified dosed formulation such as **Advil PM™**
- **Strength:** When writing the **strength of the medication**, there should be a space between a number and its units such as **10 mg**
  - Never place a decimal and zero after a whole number
  - Always place a zero before a naked decimal, such as 0.5 mg
  - Avoid the use of fractions
  - Always use the metric system
- **Dosage Form and Route of administration**
- **Dosage:** Do not use unapproved abbreviations in directions for use such as  $\mu$  for units or  $\mu\text{g}$  for micrograms
  - Avoid Latin language sig code, writing directions in English
  - Use numerals to indicate frequency such as: **4 times a day**
  - **Use numerals to designate the number of tablets, capsules, units or drops**
  - **PRN medications must include parameters for use**
  - **For medication not used chronically, write for or ask for a stop date.**
- Do not give or take an order to “resume” or “continue previous orders”, transferring your responsibility to another health care provide such as the pharmacist. Re-write all orders.
- Reconcile discharge orders with admission orders. Reconcile the physician’s orders to the MAR and TAR.
- Always discontinue existing orders before writing a new order, even if only the dosage has been changed
- Always include a reason for use to minimize confusion for look alike, sound alike medication names.  
Example: Zyrtec 10 mg **for congestion** or Zyprexa 10 mg **for Schizophrenia**.
- Avoid scientific notation or symbols such as “ $\Delta$ ” to change an order.
- When receiving a verbal order, write down the order and read it back to the caller. Ask if the order as you heard it is correct. Obtain the caller’s cell phone number.

Date Ordered	Time Ordered	Date Discontinued	DRUG	Dose & Form Route
7/16/11	9		$\Delta$ Zebeta	1.25 mg # 2.5 mg PO BID
Physician's Signature			Date	Signature of Nurse receiving order

The Delta sign on this order may look like the letter “D” and may be interpreted as Diabeta 2.5 mg.

**Correct Order:**  
Discontinue Zebeta 1.25 mg PO 3 times a day.  
Zebeta 2.5 mg PO 2 times a day for hypertension.