

Institute for Safe Medication Practices

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ISMP, FDA Plan Educational Campaign on Error-Prone Medical Abbreviations

HUNTINGDON VALLEY, Pa.— For more than thirty years, experts from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) have advocated abandoning one of the most common but preventable sources of medication errors—the use of ambiguous medical abbreviations and dose designations. That crusade is taking a significant step forward as ISMP and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announce they will create a comprehensive educational campaign to eliminate potentially harmful abbreviations.

According to the Institute of Medicine, there are more than 7,000 deaths a year due to medication errors; mistakes can occur anywhere in the medication-use system, from prescribing to administration of a drug. The practice of using medical notations that are frequently misinterpreted is a key example of an area where education of healthcare practitioners, the pharmaceutical industry, and others involved in medication use could help save lives. Acting out of the need to promote safe practices, FDA is partnering with ISMP to increase awareness of this important issue.

The campaign, slated to be launched in the first half of 2006, will recommend that ISMP's list of abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations (<http://www.ismp.org/PDF/ErrorProne.pdf>) most often associated with medication errors be referenced whenever and wherever medical information is being communicated. Some of those notations are included in the current Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) National Patient Safety Goal 2B, a "do not use" list of error-prone abbreviations and dose designations, but ISMP's full listing includes additional abbreviations that have been associated with medication errors reported to the USP-ISMP Medication Errors Reporting Program.

Specific audiences targeted will include: healthcare professionals (physicians, pharmacists, nurses, other healthcare providers, and medical students); medical writers; the pharmaceutical industry; and FDA staff. ISMP and the FDA plan to reach those audiences through development of targeted educational materials, articles in professional journals, and presentations at key conferences and meetings. Educational materials will be available in print and online.

About ISMP: The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that works closely with healthcare practitioners and institutions, regulatory agencies, consumers, and professional organizations to provide education about medication errors and their prevention. ISMP represents more than 30 years of experience in helping healthcare practitioners keep patients safe, and continues to lead efforts to improve the medication use process. For more information on ISMP, or its medication safety alert newsletters for healthcare professionals and consumers, visit www.ismp.org

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