

NCCP position paper on the use of Tall Man Lettering

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All comments and feedback are welcome at oncologydrugs@cancercontrol.ie

1 Background

Tall Man lettering is a method of applying uppercase lettering to sections of look-alike, sound-alike drug names to bring attention to the points of dissimilarity (1). It was introduced into practice by the FDA Name Differentiation Project in 2001 in conjunction with the Institute for Safe Medication Practice (ISMP). The FDA and ISMP maintain an ongoing list of look-alike drug names with recommended Tall Man letters which is regularly updated (1). A number of other international agencies also utilise Tall Man lettering in various forms as defined in their local policy (2-5).

Look-alike, sound-alike drugs have been shown to contribute to medication errors, some leading to significant patient harm (6, 7). Numerous lists of drug names where there is potential for confusion have been published in the last number of years, detailing the medicines where similarities in nomenclature exist and may pose a potential risk for error due to confusion. Oncology medications have many look-alike, sound-alike drugs (8). Tall Man lettering alone, or in conjunction with other text enhancements, have been shown to improve the accuracy of drug name perception and reduce errors due to drug name similarity (2, 9).

2 Introduction

Highlighting sections of drug names with bolded Tall Man lettering has been shown to help distinguish similar names (2). Although the use of Tall Man lettering in the reduction of medication errors has not been proven (10), it is felt to be a simple and straight forward approach to distinguishing words that look similar (4).

The use of Tall Man lettering has been adopted internationally with guidance and position statements available from a number of countries including the UK (2), the US and Canada (9), and Australia (3). While the principle of Tall Man application is the same, there is no universal agreement or standard rule based approach to deriving Tall Man lettering formats for medicines. Each has inherent differences in the way in which the Tall Man lettering has been applied.

3 NCCP Application of Tall Man lettering

- The NCCP will utilise Tall Man lettering in the following areas:
 - The NCCP Chemotherapy Regimens
 - In the chemotherapy prescribing drug file of the National Clinical Information System (NCIS)
 - Relevant NCCP documentation and correspondence
 - Other areas as deemed applicable
- Tall Man lettering will be applied judiciously in order to;
 - Maximise its effectiveness
 - Prevent overuse leading to complacency
- The FDA and ISMP lists of [look-alike drug names with recommended Tall Man letters](#) (9), and associated updates, will be utilised by the NCCP.

4 References

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8. Schulmeister L. Look-alike, sound-alike oncology medications. Clin J Oncol Nurs. 2006;10(1):35-41.
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