



Team Name: Pharmacy & Therapeutics  Team Lead: Regional Director – Pharmacy  Approved by: VP - Medical Services	Reference Number: CLI.6010.PL.002  Program Area: Pharmacy & Therapeutics  Policy Section: General
Issue Date: September 17 2015  Review Date:  Revision Date: : March 28 2019	Subject: Look-alike Sound-alike

**POLICY SUBJECT:**

Look-alike Sound-alike

**PURPOSE:**

Look-alike Sound-alike medication name pairs shall be identified and handled to mitigate selection error.

**BOARD POLICY REFERENCE:**

Executive Limitation (EL-2) Treatment of Clients

**POLICY:**

- The most current copy of the Look-alike Sound-alike names will be posted on the Health Provider Site.

**DEFINITIONS:**

***Look-alike medication pairs*** are two medications that are packaged in a very similar manner in terms of their physical appearance. Physical characteristics include: size and shape of container, colour of cap, colour of container, labeling features, etc.

***Look-alike Sound-alike medication name pairs*** are two medication names that are very similar in terms of their spelling or pronunciation (e.g. vincristine & vinblastine).

***TALLman Letters*** are uppercase letters that are used within a drug name to highlight primary dissimilarities with Look-alike Sound-alike Medication name pairs. Several studies have shown that highlighting sections of words using TALLman Lettering can make similar drug names easier to distinguish and fewer errors are made when TALLman Letters are used to differentiate products with Look-alike Sound-alike medication names. ISMP, FDA, The Joint Commission, and

other safety-conscious organizations such as the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy have promoted the use of TALLman Letters as one means of reducing confusion between Look-alike Sound-alike medication names.

**PROCEDURE:**

***Look-alike Medication Pairs:***

- All health care practitioners are encouraged to identify medication pairs that are packaged in a similar manner. Potential Look-alike Medication Pairs shall be forwarded to the Regional Director - Pharmacy
- The Regional Director - Pharmacy shall assess the medication pair by comparing the following physical characteristics:
  - Size or volume of the container
  - Shape of the container
  - Colour of the container
  - Colour of the cap
  - Colour of the label
  - Colour, font and design of medication name and concentration
- The recommendations of the Regional Director - Pharmacy shall be discussed and finalized at the Regional Pharmacy & Therapeutics Committee
- If the medication pair is identified as Look-alike, one (or more) of the following actions shall be taken
  - One of the medications will be ordered in a different strength or size (if possible)
  - Product vendor will be changed for one of the medications (if possible)
  - One of the medications will be removed from ward stock or segregated from the other “paired” medication if possible
  - The vendor will be notified
- A memo shall be distributed to communicate the recommended actions taken of the potential Look-alike Medication Pair

***Look-alike Sound-alike Medication Name Pairs:***

- If the Medication Name Pair is identified as Look-alike Sound-alike, the following actions shall be taken:
  - TALLman lettering shall be applied to the Medication Name Pair in all patient care areas used for drug prescribing and administration purposes. It shall also be applied to drug packaging labels and other drug storage labeling, where applicable.
  - One of the medications shall be removed from ward stock or segregated from the other “paired” medication if possible
- A memo shall be distributed to communicate the recommended actions taken of the potential Look-alike Medication Name Pair

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:**

[CLI.6010.PL.002.SD.01](#)

Look alike-Sound alike Names with TALLman Lettering

**REFERENCES:**

“Draft revised guidance document for industry – review of drug names for look-alike sound-alike (LASA) attributes”, Health Canada, [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/consultation/medeff/2013/lasa-pspcs/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/consultation/medeff/2013/lasa-pspcs/index-eng.php)

“Preventable medication errors – Look-alike Sound-alike drug names”, ISMP Canada Pharmacy Connection, 28-33, Spring 2014

“Use of tall man letters is gaining wide acceptance”, ISMP Medication Safety Alert Acute Care 12(15), 1-3, July 31, 2008

“Directive – Process for identifying and handling read alike/sound alike medication name pairs”  
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Winnipeg, MB, June 2012

“FDA and ISMP Lists of Look-alike Drug Names with Recommended Tall Man Letters”,  
[www.ismp.org/tools/tallmanletters.pdf](http://www.ismp.org/tools/tallmanletters.pdf)