

## THIS MONTH: DICTATION CLARITY

IT IS only natural that consultants will use a variety of ways to communicate instructions to their secretary or practice manager, writes Alison Ryan.

Abbreviations play an important part in ensuring accurate and speedy communication of these points.

Over the years a number of standard abbreviations have developed which aid in this important passage of information. These widely used terms, f/u and DNA being just two examples, are second nature to anyone who works in the sector.

However, while most medical reference books have a list of abbreviations in the back, there is no bible of medical abbreviations. Therefore there is a risk that individuals stretch the bounds of supposedly standard accepted terms and references and develop their own set of TLAs (Three Letter Abbreviations) or acronyms.

These can be dangerous as normally their successful use relies on a close relationship and understanding between a consultant and their secretary and if the latter is away and a deputy is providing cover, homemade abbreviations can result in mistakes.

With the use of dictation machines rather than face to face letter dictation (almost unheard of these days) it has also been known for consultants to stretch the assumed understanding of their secretary/practice manager. Instructions such as 'this lady needs to be booked for a block' would demand a lot of your secretary. What sort of block?

It is also not uncommon for dictations to be misheard; a good example is 'pendulum exercises' misheard and typed reading 'bedroom exercises'! It's like something out of *Hospital Doctor's* 'The things they say' column.

Dictating as clearly as possible is

very important and while it is convenient letting your secretary pp letters on your behalf, be aware of the risks and ideally check all letters before they are sent.

In summary, don't assume knowledge and, for the sake of clarity, make sure your practice manager or secretary is aware of all the standard abbreviations used in the industry. Settle on a standard set and use them together and dictate as clearly as you can.

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