

Drug Name Confusion

According to a 1999 Institute of Medicine report, approximately 7000 deaths occur each year due to medication errors. Thousands more result in mild to severe symptoms. Many of these errors are the result of name confusion: drug names that sound-alike and look-alike. Often, the indications and doses are the same or similar. In some cases, patients being treated by EMS or in the emergency department do not pronounce the names of their medications correctly, leading to confusion.

The following are just some of the drug name mix-ups that health professionals should be aware of:

Methadone and Metadate	Olanzapine and clozapine
Keppra and Kaletra	Celebrex and Celexa
Serzone and Seroquel	Zyrtec and Zyprexa, Zantac
Symbyax and Cymbalta	Narcan and Norcuron
Accutane and Accupril	Chlorpromazine and chlorpropamide
Hydrocodone and hydrocortisone	Azithromycin and erythromycin
Lamictal and lamivudine, Ludiomil, Lomotil	Xanax and Zantac
MgSO ₄ (magnesium sulfate) and MSO ₄ (morphine sulfate)	
Any drug and it's extended release form (Ex. Depakote and Depakote ER)	

How can health professionals minimize the risk of drug name mix-ups?

- Write drug names clearly on prescriptions and in patient charts
- Speak clearly and spell out the name when giving verbal orders or reports
- Do not use abbreviations for drug names, dosage units or directions
- Ask patients why they are taking the drug
- Check the strength of the drug
- Read the name off of the original Rx bottle; take the bottle to the ED when transporting patients
- If the patient doesn't have the bottle, call the poison center with a description of the tablet or capsule for help in identifying it

DID YOU KNOW THAT... The FDA received approximately 18,000 reports of medication errors from 1992 to 2001?

All actual or potential medication errors due to name confusion should be reported to the FDA's MedWatch program via telephone (800-FDA-0188), website (<http://fda.gov/medwatch>) or fax (800-FDA-1078). Call the Maryland Poison Center for help in identifying drugs and treating adverse effects associated with drug name mix-ups.



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If you do not wish to receive faxes or emails from the Maryland Poison Center, call 410.706.7604 or circle your fax number and fax this back to 410.706.7184. Supported by Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene