

LETTERS

Generic drug names: no art, no science, just enhanced safety

This is in response to the news article by Collier.¹ If trade names are confusing, try asking your patients to tell you the names of their generic medications. For the sake of patient safety, I am hoping that this letter will start a change in the way the names of generic drugs are written, in Canada at least.

Most practising Canadian physicians have been in the situation of being on the phone with a patient and asking for the names of one or more medications being taken. Physicians often know what a drug is by hearing the first few letters. Unfortunately, most of the time what is heard is the patient trying to pronounce or spell what they think is the beginning of the drug name: “T-E-V-A,” or “A-P-O” or “N-O-V-O,” etc.

With an aging population, who often have failing vision, possibly coupled with mild cognitive impairment, allowing the companies manufacturing generic drugs to

begin the name of each of their products with the first few letters of their company names is both frustrating and time consuming for both patients and physicians.

I propose that the regulatory authorities change the rules, so that the company letters appear at the end of the drug name, instead of the beginning. Patient safety will be enhanced, medical errors will be minimized, and valuable time will be saved.

Fred Saibil MD

Affiliate Scientist, Division of Gastroenterology, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre; and Professor of Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.

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Reference

1. Collier R. The art and science of naming drugs. *CMAJ* 2014;186:1053.

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