



SHORT COMMUNICATION

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## Use of acronyms in the patient dental record

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**Abstract:** The patient dental record is a legal document that captures the history of patient care for a particular patient. This article references the American Dental Association's listing of common dental abbreviations, symbols and acronyms, which aid in establishing uniformity for clinicians.

**Key words:** abbreviations; acronyms; dental record; text messaging

The patient dental record is used to capture the history of the care provided to a patient (1). This legal document is used to communicate with the patient, other providers involved in care and third-party relationships (1, 2). The patient dental record may also serve as the primary defence document during a lawsuit (3). There are many components of a patient dental record, and various states have different requirements as to the expected components including but not necessarily limited to medical history, oral evaluation, treatment plan, informed consent and progress notes (4). The dental literature is sparse with standards or guidelines for dental recordkeeping, including the use of acceptable dental abbreviations, although failure to maintain proper patient dental records may result in tremendous financial consequences and reputational damage (4–7).

Over the last twenty years, what has been described as a 'text messaging phenomenon' has significantly changed the world's communication so much so that text messaging is now complete with its own dictionary of acronyms (8, 9). Unless a clinician remains diligent regarding recordkeeping, texting acronyms may penetrate into the patient dental record. Although many dental practices have implemented electronic patient records for dental recordkeeping that should improve the illegible handwritten dental record, inappropriate abbreviations or acronyms may leave the provider at risk, once again, of undecipherable dental progress notes. Use of 'texting' acronyms in the patient dental record, which may not be universally understood by all dental providers, may potentially compromise patient care.

**Table 1. Excerpt of recommended abbreviations/acronyms from American Dental Association 2nd edition of Abbreviations, Symbols and Acronyms**

Abbreviation/Acronym	Word/Term
AL	Attachment loss
BOP	Bleeding on probing
calc	Calculus
CUD	Complete upper denture
FX	Fracture
impl	Implant
NKDA	No known drug allergies

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In 2008, the American Dental Association's Council on Dental Practice published a listing of common dental abbreviations, symbols and acronyms to establish uniformity for clinicians and others communicating dental information (10). An excerpt of recommended abbreviations/acronyms for terms is listed in Table 1. This free resource is available in pdf format from the American Dental Association's website (ADA.org).

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