



The Royal College of
Anaesthetists



The Association of
Anaesthetists of Great Britain
and Ireland



The Faculty of Accident
and Emergency Medicine



The Intensive Care
Society

Dear Colleague,

The enclosed colour code chart for syringe labelling, is the result of a joint initiative by the Royal College of Anaesthetists, the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, the Intercollegiate Faculty of Accident and Emergency Medicine and the Intensive Care Society.

We have been aware for some time, of the differences in syringe labelling in different parts of the UK and the potential risk, which this poses, to patients and those involved in the delivery of critical care. The coding system, which we are recommending, is already used in North America and Australasia.

While we realise that extra care will be necessary during the changeover period, we feel that the long-term benefits of a national and internationally recognised colour coding system will help to reduce drug administration errors even further. The label manufacturers have already been notified in advance, to ensure adequate supplies of the new colours.

We hope that you will feel that this has been a sensible and worthwhile joint venture and that you are able to support it.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter J Simpson
President-Elect
Royal College of Anaesthetists

Dr Richard J S Birks
Honorary Treasurer-Elect
*Association of Anaesthetists
Great Britain and Ireland*



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Syringe labelling in critical care areas

As part of the Department of Health's drive to minimise drug administration errors in critical care areas, the Councils of the Royal College of Anaesthetists, the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, the Faculty of Accident and Emergency Medicine and the Intensive Care Society have all agreed to recommend the adoption of a single standard for syringe labelling. While not advocating the use of specific colours for individual drugs, our recommended system identifies groups of drugs with a common colour, as occurs at present in most hospitals.

The four Councils recommend adoption of the International Colour Coding System for Syringe Labelling, which is already widely used both in North America and Australasia, the details of which are attached to this notice.

Existing manufacturers of coloured syringe labels are also being notified of this proposed standardisation in the hope that it can be implemented on or after 1 May 2003. Some examples are listed below.

Induction agents

Propofol
.....mg/ml

Ketamine
.....mg/ml

Hypnotics

Diazepam
.....mg/ml

Midazolam
.....mg/ml

Muscle relaxants

Succinylcholine
.....mg/ml

Vecuronium
.....mg/ml

Relaxant antagonist

Neostigmine
.....mg/ml

Narcotics

Morphine
.....mg/ml

Fentanyl
.....mg/ml

Narcotic antagonist

Naloxone
.....mg/ml

Vasopressors

Epinephrine
.....mg/ml

Ephedrine
.....mg/ml

Hypotensive agent

Nitroprusside
.....mg/ml

Anticholinergic agents

Atropine
.....mg/ml

Glycopyrrolate
.....mg/ml

Local anaesthetics

Lignocaine
.....mg/ml

Bupivacaine
.....mg/ml

Further information is available from the manufacturer or the following websites: www.astm.org and www.csa.ca

Please note that colours are only a guide and the correct Pantone colour code numbers are listed on the reverse of this sheet. It is still important to check the drug ampoule and correctly label the syringe containing the drug with the correctly texted label. There are several colour schemes currently available in the UK and some of the new standard colours may clash directly with what you are used to. Extra vigilance is required in the change to this standard.

Standard background colours for user-applied syringe drug labels

Drug class	Examples	Pantone® colour (uncoated)
Induction agents	Thiopentone, etomidate, ketamine, propofol	Yellow (process)
Hypnotics	Diazepam, lorazepam, midazolam	Pantone® 151 (orange)
Hypnotic antagonists	Flumazenil	Pantone® 151 (orange) with white diagonal stripes
Muscle relaxants	Succinylcholine, pancuronium, atracurium, mivacurium, rocuronium	Pantone® 805 (fluorescent red or warm red)
Relaxant antagonists	Neostigmine, edrophonium, pyridostigmine	Pantone® 805 (fluorescent red or warm red) with white diagonal stripes
Narcotics	Morphine, fentanyl, remifentanyl	Pantone® 297 (blue)
Narcotic antagonists	Naloxone	Pantone® 297 (blue) with white diagonal stripes
Major tranquilizers	Droperidol, chlorpromazine	Pantone® 156 (salmon)
Vasopressors	Epinephrine, ephedrine, phenylephrine	Patone® 256 (violet)
Hypotensive agents	Nitroprusside, nitroglycerine, phentolamine	Pantone® 256 (violet) with white diagonal stripes
Local anaesthetics	Lignocaine, bupivacaine	Pantone® 401 (grey)
Anticholinergic agents	Atropine, glycopyrrolate	Pantone® 367 (green)
Other agents	Oxytocin, heparin, protamine, antibiotics	Pantone® transparent white

The examples shown are representative, not restrictive. See Pantone® Colour Formula Guide. Pantone® is a registered trademark of Pantone, Inc.