

# Safety alert: doctors call for action on look-alike medicines

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DOCTORS are calling for action on look-alike and sound-alike medicines and for the names of active ingredients to be displayed more prominently than brand names, amid concerns about patient safety.

In a submission to the TGA's review of packaging and labelling, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) said the generic name should be at least 50% bigger than the brand name.

The AMA, the Australasian Integrative Medicines Association and individual doctors also expressed their support for increasing the prominence of generic names.

The RACP said pharmaceutical companies and regulators should be required to check for look-alike and sound-alike names and that so-called 'umbrella branding' of the same drug for different symptoms



should not be allowed.

Examples of too-similar names included Deralin/Deptran and Avandia/Avanza.

A submission from Western Sydney Local Health Network recounted an adverse event in an 85-year-old man caused by near identical packaging of lignocaine

hydrochloride injection 1% in 5ml and heparin sodium injection 5000 units in 5ml.

The patient inadvertently mixed one 5ml ampoule of lignocaine with one 5ml ampoule of heparin and began haemodialysis. The intravenous infusion of lignocaine caused clotting of the

circuit and he lost about 500ml of blood.

"This incident highlights a critical safety concern that is in part related to the identical packaging of the heparin and lignocaine solutions used by the patient. This issue demands urgent action," senior clinical staff said.

Medicines Australia agreed the active ingredient name should be prominent and that the ability to identify medicines was important but said "changes diminishing the value of product branding or packaging must be supported by evidence and robust assessment of regulatory cost against measurable benefits".

The TGA said that while there was general support for the changes, there was some significant opposition to the proposed approaches. It said it would continue to work with stakeholders and would consider alternative solutions.

