

Documentation Matters: Tip #2

Is it appropriate to use abbreviations or acronyms in social work documentation?

As noted in the NLASW (2018) Standards of Practice for Social Workers in Newfoundland and Labrador “The primary purpose of social work recording is to provide a clear statement of social work assessment, intervention, and professional decision-making” (p. 5). It is important that the writing and language used in the note is clear and not left open to misinterpretations. Anyone reading the record should be able to follow one’s assessment and decision-making.

While the use of abbreviations and acronyms are not prohibited, social workers must use their own professional judgment and assess whether their use would add clarity or confusion. The following questions would be helpful to reflect on:

- Is the abbreviation or acronym widely known (e.g., HIV/AIDS, PTSD)?
- Could the acronym be confusing (e.g., SA could mean sexual assault or substance abuse)?
- Has the full word with the acronym been used previously in the record?
- Is the abbreviation or acronym one that is used by other team members in the circle of care or approved by one’s program area?
- Could client care be impacted?



For more information about social work documentation, visit the NLASW website at www.nlasw.ca.