

MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY  
1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN

INFORMATION SHEET: 19

## PRESCRIPTION READING

TODAY'S NHS PRESCRIPTIONS ARE USUALLY PRODUCED USING COMPUTERS.  
PRIVATE PRESCRIPTIONS AND EARLY NHS PRESCRIPTIONS WERE HAND-  
WRITTEN ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL STANDARD PROCEDURES.

### HISTORY

Latin has been regarded as the language of the learned and the intellectual. Prescriptions were cloaked in mystery. What the doctor prescribed was a mystery to the patient, a secret between him and the pharmacist who would dispense the medicine. (It was not until 1972 that it was recommended to label patients' medicine with its name.) Part of the doctor's training would be how to write a prescription, the pharmacist's to read it and interpret the doctor's intentions.

### THE PRESCRIPTION

#### Patient's name and address

In many cases only the patient's name was given, or perhaps the patient's position in life, for example, Lady Smythe's cook, Mrs Jones' baby. The address was not compulsory in some categories of medicines that were available by prescription until the advent of Poison Rules in 1935.

#### R

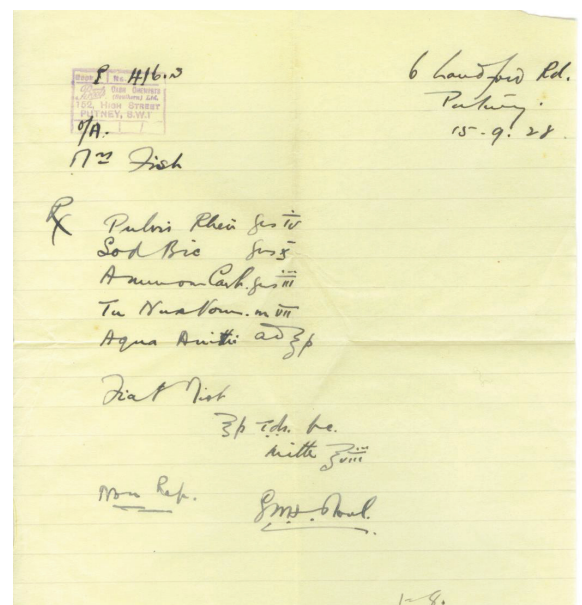
The sign is an abbreviation of 'recipe', which in Latin means 'take thou' although more mystic meanings have been attributed to it (see Information Sheet 13).

#### Ingredients

The medicinal ingredients are listed with a quantity in weight, volume, percentage or proportion.

#### M ft

*Misce fiat* – mix and make. Directions from the prescriber indicating the form in which he requires the prescription to be dispensed, for example, a mixture, an ointment, a pill etc. The illustrated example states "Fiat Mist" meaning make a mixture.



## Dosage

The dosage is in Latin. It reads 'One tablespoonful three times a day after food'.

To this day, Latin abbreviations are used. Among the more common are:

om	<i>omne mane</i>	every morning
bd	<i>bis die</i>	twice a day
tds	<i>ter die sumendus</i>	to be taken three times a day
qh	<i>quartis horis</i>	every four hours
hs	<i>hora somni</i>	at bedtime
n	<i>nocte</i>	at night
ud	<i>ut dictum</i>	as directed
ac	<i>ante cibos</i>	before food
pc	<i>post cibos</i>	after food
ex aq	<i>ex aqua</i>	with water
sos	<i>si opus sit</i>	when necessary
prn	<i>pro re nata</i>	as occasion arises

## Mitte

Means *send*. It is the amount to be dispensed as a number, weight or volume. The amount on this prescription is eight fluid ounces.

## Signature

The doctor's verification of an authentic prescription.

## Date

Most important if the prescription is for a Dangerous or Controlled Drug as a time limit of thirteen weeks is imposed for the presentation of the prescription to the pharmacist. For Prescription Only Medicines (POM) the time is twenty-six weeks.

## Doctor's name and address

Both are essential for certain categories of prescribed medicines.

## Repeats

If the doctor wished, he could state a number of times that the prescription could be repeated.

## RECORDS

It is a recommendation that a copy of all dispensed private prescriptions should be entered into a dedicated record book (Prescription Book). It became a legal requirement for certain categories of prescribed medicines. If the medicine is a Controlled Drug (previously a Dangerous Drug) then an entry has to be made in a dedicated register.

The prescription would be endorsed with the pharmacist's stamp and the code for the record entry in the prescription book. It also included the price. However, this was encoded to prevent a competitor under-cutting if the prescription was presented at a different pharmacy. The price was encoded by translating the numbers into letters. For example, Boots the Chemists used the phrase "O PUSH TRADE" to represent numbers. Thus O/A as on the illustrated prescription stood for 1/8 (one shilling and eight pence – approx. 9p).

The private prescription could be returned to the patient provided it did not prescribe a medicine only available by prescription.

The illustration overleaf is of a dispensed prescription. The ingredients are: Powdered Rhubarb Root, Sodium Bicarbonate, Ammonium Carbonate, Tincture of Nux Vomica and Dill Water.

This information sheet is also available in a large font size.

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