

## Hyperbaric Oxygen: A Plea for Uniform Nomenclature

*To the Editor:*

At its meeting in Anchorage in 1996, the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Committee of the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society voted to adopt "HBO<sub>2</sub>" as the official UHMS abbreviation for hyperbaric oxygen. That recommendation was accepted by the UHMS Executive Committee, and the abbreviation was subsequently used in Society publications. These include not only the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Committee Report, but also *Pressure, Undersea & Hyperbaric Medicine (UHM)*, and so on.

The Committee recommended HBO<sub>2</sub> as the UHMS abbreviation for reasons related to both science and image. The correct scientific abbreviation for oxygen is "O<sub>2</sub>", not "O". In everyday use, very few individuals would understand what was being referred to if O were requested, but even non-medical people would understand O<sub>2</sub>.

Second, mention of another popular abbreviation for hyperbaric oxygen, HBO, frequently elicits snickers from those unfamiliar with the term because of its shared usage with a popular television movie channel. Hearing the term HBO probably causes more of the lay public to conjure up visions of motel readerboards advertising "free continental breakfast and HBO" than sophisticated medical facilities capable of providing lifesaving medical care to the critically ill.

Despite the fact that the UHMS adopted the abbreviation HBO<sub>2</sub> 3 years ago, members have been slow to change. A review of the abstract issue of *UHM* for the 1999 UHMS meeting in Boston illustrates this (1). The 205 abstracts refer to hyperbaric oxygen a total of 598 times, using 11 different abbreviations (Table 1). Among these, 97% of the abbreviations are not the Society standard "HBO<sub>2</sub>".

While those of us familiar with hyperbaric oxygen therapy on a regular basis may be able to decipher some of the more novel abbreviations, those outside our field may not. It would be just as easy to suspect that HBO<sub>2</sub>, HBO2, and HBO<sup>2</sup> stand for different quantities as the same. If hyperbaric oxygen therapy is to be assimilated by mainstream medicine, the use of a single term seems appropriate.

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## REFERENCE

1. *Undersea Hyper Med* 1999;26(suppl):9-73.

**Table 1: Terms Used to Refer to  
"Hyperbaric Oxygen" in the 1999  
UHMS Annual Scientific  
Meeting Abstracts (Ref 1)**

Term	Times Used
Hyperbaric oxygen	132
HBO	309
HBO <sub>2</sub>	75
HBO2	15
HBO <sup>2</sup>	1
HBOT	32
HBO-T	4
HBOTX	7
HBO <sub>2</sub> T	10
HBO2T	12
Hyperbaric O2	1