M: Procedure for verbal orders by telephone for drugs.

M.1 When a doctor initially writes a prescription sheet, the nurse and doctor responsible for the patient should ensure suitable PRN drugs (e.g. analgesics, antiemetics, night sedation and any infusion liquids) are prescribed to prevent the need for a verbal order.

M.2 Verbal prescribing via the telephone by doctors to nurses is a potentially unsafe practice, and verbal orders for Controlled Drugs are illegal.

M.3 In an emergency, the following points must be followed:

- A doctor who knows the patient or who is on call must make the verbal order to a qualified nurse. The doctor’s signature must also feature in the collection of specimen signatures in the back of the drug chart folder.
- The qualified nurse must repeat the instruction back to the doctor.
- The doctor must then repeat the instruction to another qualified nurse if available, or to the first nurse again if a second qualified nurse is not available.
- The qualified nurse must write the verbal prescription on the appropriate part of the patient's prescription chart before the drug is administered.
- The qualified nurse must also write 'verbal order', their own signature and their own surname in capitals in the “Comments” box of the prescription. They must also document the date and time that the verbal order was made in the date box. Lastly, they must write the name in capitals of the verbal prescriber in the signature box, leaving enough space for this person to add their own signature in due course.
- A doctor must countersign the written prescription at the earliest opportunity and certainly within one working day.

M.4 The nurse receiving the verbal order takes responsibility for that order. Every nurse has the right to refuse to take a verbal order. Any problems that arise must be referred to the nurse in charge of the shift. If they cannot be resolved easily, the Senior Nurse, Director of Nursing or Medical Director must be involved.

M.5 Verbal orders from a doctor to the Pharmacist can frequently occur. These are usually instigated by the Pharmacist to clarify a prescription and make it safe. This is accepted practice. In such situations, the Pharmacist will amend a prescription with clear annotation of the change, the doctor's name, the Pharmacist's name and the date of the amendment. This does not need to be countersigned by a doctor. (See Section K.5.5 and K.9 for more information).