# Safety Enhanced Design Brief **Effective Table Design**

Tables are used exclusively for lists of patients, medications, results, etc.

While tables seem simple, careful design is needed as even small mistakes can have a significant impact on:

- Patient safety: e.g. Truncated names will lead to wrong patient selection; column headers scrolling out of view will lead users to read the wrong test result value.
- Efficiency: e.g. Users will waste a lot of time scanning and scrolling if no search or sort is provided.

This set of guidelines is just a small sample of the available guidelines for table design.

#### To prevent common errors

- Keep the headers visible at all times (do not allow them to scroll out of sight)
- Use multiple lines for long column headers (do not truncate them)
- If truncation of a table is unavoidable:
  Try using multiple lines or tooltips for showing what does not fit in the cell
- Avoid using error-prone abbreviations, and provide a long version in a tooltip (see http://www.ismp.org/tools/errorprone abbreviations.pdf)
- Never truncate patient names (see Color Use Brief https://sbmi.uth.edu/ nccd/SED/Briefs/sedb-q01.htm)

- Use alternating shading of rows in wide tables (every 1 or 2 rows to help track rows across columns)

#### **2** To improve task efficiency

- Place the most important columns on the left
- Group together columns (or rows) that are used together

## 3 To help users find data

- Make the important information stand out (https://sbmi.uth.edu/nccd/SED/Briefs /sedb-g01.htm)
- Use light white space between the rows (instead of heavy gridlines)
- Use a different style for headers

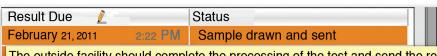
Patient	•	Test	Order Date	Review By	<u>/</u> >>
Evans, Anna		MRI/F	Mar 3, 2011	Mar 10, 2011	1:12 AM
Parker, Amy		MRI/P	Mar 2, 2011	Mar 9, 2011	11:42 PM

## 4 To make information readable

- Allow user to adjust font size and adjust the table layout accordingly
- Provide tooltips for icons, headers, or abbreviations when pointer is over them
- Avoid leaving any hanging zeros (e.g. 5.0 vs 5)
- Align numeric values to the right while keeping all other values left-aligned

- Align both the time and the date in a date column (double alignment)

Mar 10, 2011 1:12 AM Mar 9, 2011 11:42 PM



The outside facility should complete the processing of the test and send the results back on this date. (You may change this value)

# 5 To keep the table compact

 Avoid horizontal scrolling if at all possible (or indicate that there are more columns)

Patient	Test	More >>	
Hayes, Robert	MRI		
Kraft, Amber	Blood (BMP)		
Masterson, Jane	TSH		

- Reduce white space by calculating the initial width of each column from the data in that column
- Allow resizing of columns (but calculate a minimum and maximum)
- Only the last column should be stretched to fill horizontal space

- Allow enough space between columns to separate them (but not more)

## 6 For large tables

- Provide search functionality
- Permit re-sorting of tables with a click on the column header (show sort icons and choose the default sorting carefully)

# 7

#### To indicate editable columns

 Change the mouse pointer when the user moves over an editable field, and add an icon in the column header (e.g. a pen icon)

Patient 🔻 🥖	Test
Morris, Monica	TSH
Parker, Amy	MRI
Peterson, Audrey	Blood (BMP)

