



WHO and IHTSDO Strive for Harmonization of Health Information *Interoperability of WHO Classifications and SNOMED CT to Benefit Global Health*

Copenhagen, Denmark, July 22, 2010 - The International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation (IHTSDO) announced today a collaborative arrangement with the World Health Organization (WHO) to harmonize WHO classifications and SNOMED CT for the benefit of citizens around the world.

“IHTSDO sees this collaboration as a way to make it easier for patients, clinicians, and health authorities to get and use accurate and trusted information,” says Martin Severs, Chair of the IHTSDO Management Board. “We share the goal of having WHO classifications and SNOMED CT work effectively together in order to allow users of the standards from around the world to develop better information and to focus efforts on improving health and healthcare for individuals and populations.”

WHO Classifications and SNOMED CT are complementary tools. When used together appropriately, they make it easier to summarize information from individual patients’ health records into aggregate results needed for health policy, health services management, and research.

“The road to health passes through information,” says Tim Evans, WHO’s Assistant Director General for Information, Evidence, and Research. “WHO and IHTSDO aim to increase collaboration to create and maintain jointly usable and integrated classification and terminology systems to make efficient and effective use of public resources and avoid duplication of effort. This is essential to create health information standards as a common language worldwide.”

WHO Classifications are used to capture key information on diseases, disability and interventions and other indicators of population health. Main classifications such as the ICD (International Classification of Diseases), in use for more than 100 years worldwide, provide data on life expectancy, causes of death, and inform the plans and decisions of health authorities in many countries. The detailed information that is aggregated for public health purposes using WHO classifications often comes from health records, which are increasingly being held in electronic form.

Electronic health records (EHRs) contain information that is important for the care of individuals, such as health problems, and care plans. Summaries of information in EHRs, extracted in a way that respects privacy of patients, are also crucial for management, health financing and general health system administration. As a result, the accuracy and consistency of EHRs is crucial for both patient care and to ensure sound management of health systems resources. SNOMED CT, a standardized health terminology, can help to represent clinically relevant information in a consistent, reliable, and comprehensive way in EHRs. The terminology is used to help patients and their care providers capture more detailed key information on disease, disability, and



interventions in patients' health records. Managed by the IHTSDO, it is used for this purpose and others in countries around the world.

This new agreement supports the aims of WHO and IHTSDO to enhance health through better health information. Synergies between WHO classifications and SNOMED CT have the potential, through better information, to improve the accuracy, reliability, and quality of health and health care; to eliminate gaps in information; and to control costs.

About WHO

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends. WHO owns the intellectual property rights in main reference classifications International Classification of Diseases (ICD), International Classification of Functioning (ICF) and others within the WHO Family of International Classifications. For more information, see www.who.int or contact Dr. Bedirhan Ustun, ustunb@who.int or +41227913609.

About IHTSDO

The IHTSDO (International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation) and its Members seek to improve the health of humankind by fostering the development and use of suitable standardized clinical terminologies, notably SNOMED CT™, in order to support the safe, accurate, and effective exchange of health information. SNOMED CT is a standardized terminology that is used in more than 50 countries around the world as the foundation for electronic health records and other applications. The IHTSDO is an international organization, established as a Danish not-for-profit association. SNOMED CT was originally created by the College of American Pathologists by combining SNOMED RT and a computer-based nomenclature and classification known as Clinical Terms Version 3, formerly known as Read Codes Version. For more information, see www.ihtsdo.org.

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