



Tel. direct: +41 22 791
Fax direct: +41 22 791
E-mail : ustunb@who.int

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I take great pleasure in informing you about the signature of a Collaborative Arrangement between the International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation (IHTSDO) and The World Health Organization (WHO).

The Collaborative Arrangement enables harmonization - as complementary tools - of WHO Classifications and SNOMED CT for the benefit of citizens around the world. When used together appropriately, they make it easier to summarize information from individual patients' health records into aggregated results needed for health policy, health services management, and research. WHO and IHTSDO aim to increase collaboration in order 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's standards as a common language worldwide.

WHO Classifications are used to capture key information on diseases, disability, interventions and other indicators of population's 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.

SNOMED CT is a standardized health terminology that represents clinical concepts in a consistent, and comprehensive way in health records. Managed by the IHTSDO, it is used for this purpose and others in countries around the world. Given the emergence of Electronic Health Records (EHRs), the use of standardized terminologies has become more important for meaningful exchange of data in health information systems.

This collaboration arrangement will be used to build maps and linkages between ICD and SNOMED CT for automated processing of data to improve coding and information exchange. It will also enhance the work on the revision of the ICD for its 11th revision.

This new arrangement 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, the reliability, and the quality of health and health care; to eliminate gaps in information; and to control costs.

I hope that you will benefit from this collaborative arrangement to improve your health information system and will play a key role with WHO and IHTSDO to produce the international public goods resulting from this joint work. For more information you may contact Dr B. Ustun (ustunb@who.int) at WHO or Ms J. Zelmer (ceo@ihtsdo.org) at IHTSO.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Najeeb Al Shorbaji
Acting Assistant Director-General
Information, Evidence and Research