The Conceptual Framework
for the
International Classification for Patient Safety

Version 1.1

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

Chapter 1
Background

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The Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly passed resolution WHA55.18 in May 2002. WHA55.18 called upon Member States to “pay the closest possible attention to the problem of patient safety and to establish and strengthen science-based systems necessary for improving patients’ safety and quality of care.” The Assembly urged the WHO to develop global norms and standards and to support efforts by Member States to develop patient safety policies and practices.

In October 2004, WHO launched the World Alliance for Patient Safety. The project to develop an international classification for patient safety was identified as one of the key initiatives in the Alliance’s 2005 Forward Programme (Taxonomy for Patient Safety).

What is a classification?

A classification comprises a set of concepts linked by semantic relationships. It provides a structure for organizing information to be used for a variety of other purposes, including national statistics, descriptive studies and evaluative research. It is important to distinguish a classification from a reporting system, which provides an interface to enable users to collect, store and retrieve data in a reliable and organized fashion.

The International Classification for Patient Safety (ICPS) is not yet a complete classification. It is a conceptual framework for an international classification which aims to provide a reasonable understanding of the world of patient safety and patient safety concepts to which existing regional and national classifications can relate.

Drafting Group

The Drafting Group was comprised of experts from the fields of patient safety, classification theory, health informatics, consumer/patient advocacy, law and medicine. From the start, the Drafting Group realized that the “problems do not lie with the words we use but rather with the underlying concepts.” This means that it is the conceptual definitions that are important, as well as the terms or labels assigned to the concepts. Without universally accepted conceptual definitions, understanding will continue to be impeded.

To guide its work, the Drafting Group followed a set of principles:

- The purpose and potential users and uses for the classification be clearly articulated;
- The classification be based upon concepts as opposed to terms or labels;
- The language used for the definitions of the concepts be culturally and linguistically appropriate;
- The concepts be organized into meaningful and useful categories;
- The categories be applicable to the full spectrum of healthcare settings in developing, transitional and developed countries;

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1 Fifty-Fifth World Health Assembly. Res. WHA55.18. 18 May 2002
• The classification be complementary to the WHO Family of International Classifications\(^3,4,5\);
• The existing patient safety classifications be used as the basis for developing the international classification’s conceptual framework\(^6,7,8,9\); and
• The conceptual framework be a genuine convergence of international perceptions of the main issues related to patient safety.

**How was the conceptual framework developed and key concepts identified and defined?**

The Drafting Group developed the conceptual framework for the ICPS over the course of three years.\(^10\) There has been a strong commitment to ensuring the conceptual framework for the ICPS is a genuine convergence of international perceptions of the main issues related to patient safety. The validity of the conceptual framework for the ICPS was evaluated through a two-round web-based modified Delphi survey\(^11\) and an in-depth analysis by technical experts representing the fields of safety, systems engineering, health policy, medicine and the law\(^12\).

The conceptual framework for the ICPS and the 48 key concepts and preferred terms were also evaluated for cultural and linguistic appropriateness by native French, Spanish, Japanese and Korean-speaking technical experts.\(^13,14,15\) The technical experts that participated in the validity testing and cultural/linguistic evaluation found the conceptual framework for the ICPS to be fit for purpose, and meaningful, useful and appropriate for classifying patient safety data and information.

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\(^10\) History of the Project to Develop the International Classification for Patient Safety – http://www.who.int/patientsafety/taxonomy/evolution/en/index.html


