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The Importance of Meaning: The Global Effort to Manage COVID-19 Through Collaboration and Clinical Terminology

Management of patient information and information standards regarding sharing, analysis and planning have become critical today. SNOMED International offers SNOMED CT, the world's largest clinical terminology with a collection of 350,000+ clinical concepts for improved management of patient data.

The global campaign to address COVID-19 is being advanced on many clinical and administrative fronts; across towns, cities, provinces, states, and nations. The impact of its reach has, and will continue to, extract human, social, and economic consequences globally. If there has been any learning fully absorbed across continents, it is the fragile interdependency of our ecosystems.

Embedded within this landscape is the management of patient information and the information standards that govern its sharing, clinical analysis and health system planning. True to its form, SNOMED International and its core product, SNOMED CT, serves as a foundational building block critical to the effective use of electronic health records. SNOMED CT is the world's largest clinical terminology, representing a collection of more than 350,000+ clinical concepts and built upon ontological principles, particularly useful when applied to structure patient data for research and planning capacities.

In cases where a global emergency persists and warrants action, the SNOMED International organization has responded swiftly to issue updated structured clinical terminology content to serve the public good. With current releases, clinicians, researchers and administrators globally are enabled to code, analyze and plan to address the Coronavirus effort with the most up to date terminology. Data on related hospitalizations give health care administrators a more comprehensive picture of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on its patients within the health-care system. Leveraging coded data lends itself to identifying emerging outbreaks and structured clinical terminology is a key component to supporting leaders as they need to make critical decisions. To serve a global need without reservation, SNOMED International has also committed to include



SNOMED International Community Business Meetings



SNOMED International Member Forum



SNOMED International General Assembly

quality assured COVID-19 content in its Global Patient Set, a managed list of existing SNOMED CT unique identifiers, fully specified names, preferred terms in international English, etc. The Global Patient Set is free for use across the world and governed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License thereby making our COVID-19 content barrier-free in the spirit of improving health care globally.

While the function clinical terminology serves is critical, it is perhaps the underlying structure and fabric of the organization that has evolved since early 2000 that has yielded returns amid the current pandemic. A global coalition of the willing, SNOMED International comprises a varied collection of Member countries which represent approximately a third of the global population across the Americas, Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Asia Pacific. A new year punctuated with a global crisis, SNOMED International Members have leveraged their international forum to discuss approaches, policy, content and implementation guidance concerning COVID-19.

New Zealand sharing its COVID-19 Community Based Assessment Data Standard, the United States presenting interoperability standards supporting the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus Pandemic, the Netherlands, Australia and Canada releasing and sharing augmented COVID-19 content, and Sweden's creation of a specific reference set representative of COVID-19 terms and associated meanings are demonstrative outcomes of this global effort. Adding to this, many Members, the United Kingdom a prime example, have crafted implementation guidance for their respective jurisdictions and shared with the SNOMED CT community to discuss commonalities, differences and opportunities. The dialogue and contributions produced from this community

has been extensive and contributes to the representative development of tools and resources.

Surpassing national borders, collaboration among our industry and collaborative partners have also strived to deliver benefits to a dedicated Member and user community. Joint collaboration efforts with HL7 International and Regenstrief Institute partners on the release of HL7 FHIR enabled codes for clinical and pathology information for the COVID-19 needs of users is one such example.

In the weeks to follow, SNOMED International will release implementation guidance driven by our collective efforts as both organization and Member community. What remains true is that our current reality is all encompassing and will affect each nation differently, exposing different terminology needs for each and reaching beyond the pressing needs for patient care. ■

To learn more about our Members and SNOMED CT, visit www.snomed.org or dialogue with our community on Twitter @Snomedct.

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