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UK

Better patient safety through electronic communication between clinicians has been secured by the adoption of a common clinical language across all healthcare settings and organisations. Nurses, doctors, physiotherapists are now using SNOMED Clinical Terms (CT), the most comprehensive, multilingual clinical healthcare terminology in the world, meaning that information is exchanged accurately and safely across England.

The Information Standards Board for Health and Social Care, has approved this as a fundamental standard and notified all NHS organisations, independent providers and information system suppliers of the need to use SNOMED CT when providing care.

SNOMED CT is available in more than fifty countries including the US, Canada, Australia, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands. It is already widely used in the UK for the exchange of clinical information, including the Choose and Book service for hospital appointments and for patients' Summary Care Records.

In England, using this common language will enable nurses and doctors working in Primary, Secondary, Community, Mental Health and Social care to all contribute to healthcare shared records.

Health Minister, Simon Burns said: "A common clinical language means nurses and doctors in all care settings can deliver a more effective and safer healthcare system. The adoption of SNOMED CT is an important milestone and will mean clearer and consistent communication between hospitals and GPs. Having a standard language also helps patients better understand their care records."

The UK is a world-leader in the development and use of healthcare terminologies and the use of coded clinical data has significantly increased over the last ten years. All GP records are recorded using terminologies, and there are estimated to be in excess of six billion items of coded data in GP records alone. A comprehensive terminology makes possible clear and consistent communication of clinical information, and improves record keeping, record sharing and speed of entry of information.

Jan Eric-Slot, Chief Executive of the International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation who owns and manages the SNOMED CT terminology on behalf of 15 member countries, including the UK mentioned: "This is excellent news that one of our leading members has made this important commitment to use SNOMED CT in all healthcare settings. SNOMED CT contributes to the improvement of patient care, enabling systems to accurately record healthcare encounters, deliver decision support and exchange information effectively between healthcare providers. We look forward to supporting them in this important endeavour."

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