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WHO USES WEB-BASED APPROACH TO REVISE GLOBAL DISEASE STANDARDS

Tokyo/Geneva - The World Health Organization (WHO) is launching a major online project to revise the global standard for medical and health statistics - the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). For the first time, WHO is inviting stakeholders to participate in the ICD revision through an internet platform.

This update is vital in order to keep up with recent progress in medicine and the use of information technology in the field of health, and to improve the basis for international comparisons. The last version of ICD was adopted in 1990 by all WHO Member States, which have formally agreed to use it as a standard to report diseases and deaths. The first meeting of a steering group to oversee the revision is taking place in Japan from 16 to 18 April, 2007.

Any user can enter suggestions to improve the ICD via a new web application called "ICD-10 Plus" (<http://extranet.who.int/icdrevision>). Any user who registers can contribute to the revision and back their proposal with evidence.

Users can also see what others have proposed and discuss these topics through a blog. These suggestions will be reviewed by expert groups and formulated as an ICD-11 draft, which is the second step in the revision process. The draft will be formulated using a "wiki", similar to the widely known internet encyclopedia "Wikipedia" - but with stricter editorial rules to jointly author the next version of this international public good.

Emerging diseases and scientific developments, combined with advances in service delivery and health information systems, require a revision of this global classification system. One major need is to improve the relevance of the ICD in primary care settings (clinics, doctors' offices and frontline health services), as that is where most people are treated. Another key driver is the development of computerised health information systems that require classifying electronic patient records according to the ICD.

The design of the ICD has a direct impact on health care, as it influences public health programmes, prevention, reimbursement and treatment. Countries use it to compile basic health statistics and to monitor health spending. To compare findings between countries, a common standard is needed. For example, a comparison of life expectancy from the beginning of the 20th century to today was only possible thanks to mortality data using ICD.

Previous ICD revisions were based on annual revision conferences attended by a limited number of selected experts. This internet-based revision process provides wider scientific input, greater transparency and better exchange with the wide range of users, making the final ICD revision more useful. The internet platform will also allow testing of the new classification before WHO Member States accept it as a global standard.

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