Reviewer’s report

Title: A SNOMED CT encoding method for palliative care

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Reviewer: Marie-Christine Jaulent

Reviewer’s report:

The paper describes an experiment of using SNOMED-CT to record patient data. The problem to answer is “how the encoding can be done?” The paper focus on describing the encoding method itself and its application using the palliative care dataset. The authors propose a four steps method using 3 software tools (described elsewhere – argumentation for the use of these tools). Steps are clearly described with examples.

Discretionary Revisions

About the 1st step: Candidate terms are identified in the source database. Input documents are structured (data elements) and the answers can be structured (coded values) or unstructured (free text values). An audit trail is kept while extracting candidate terms. There is a lot of manual work in this process and natural language processing tools have already been tested for that kind of process. Do you intend to investigate in this direction? What is the amount of candidate terms that you obtained during this step?

About the 2nd step: The idea of this step is to reduce the number of terms to be matched to SnomedCT (interface terminology) to prepare the normalisation. For this step, the use of domain ontology could be useful (the use of a hierarchy).

About the 3rd step: This step corresponds to the encoding of terms. I have some questions: - How many term are encoded using the bach mode? - The attempt for post-coordination is done manually ? - In the bach matching algorithm how the normalisation is performed ?

About the 4th step: The last step is the exportation of encoded terms as SCT term sets.

The rest of the paper deals with the application of the encoding method to a pilot project. Quantitative results are provided step by step. Are the authors happy with the results ? Is the work close to being finished ?

Minor essential revisions

Add an argumentation for the use of the 3 software tools.

How are you going to show that the method is scalable? (The guideline for the selection process)

Give an idea of how you will measure the impact of using Snomed-CT (I don’t
really see the interoperability application in the paper)
More information about needed human resources is required

Major Compulsory Revisions
None

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests