



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

WHO/GPE/CAS/C/01.23
Distr.: LIMITED
ENGLISH ONLY

MEETING OF HEADS OF WHO COLLABORATING CENTRES
FOR THE FAMILY OF INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Bethesda, MD, USA
21-27 October 2001

Dissemination policies for ICD-10

by

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Abstract

The Electronic Tools Committee agreed to prepare a discussion paper on dissemination policies for ICD-10 related products (electronic versions) with the aim to recommend a future strategy to WHO. This paper will list the advantages and disadvantages of the following three approaches:

- ICD-10 related products should be in the public domain;
- ICD-10 related products should be sold by a commercial company;
- ICD-10 related products should be sold by WHO directly.

The paper will be used to trigger a discussion at the session of the Electronic Tools Committee during the 2001 Centre Heads Meeting. This discussion should lead to a final recommendation.

The present situation

WHO sells ICD floppy disks at 540 US\$ for the English language. <Gérard: Also in French?> On these floppy disks ICD is stored in Word Perfect format and in ASCII text format. There are no files suitable for import into database systems.

In countries using ICD-10 in English or French, the situation is as follows:

- If the country uses a modified version (e.g. a clinical modification), special national files are available to the users. In most cases these files are more suitable for electronic data processing.
- If the country uses the original version, either WHO files have to be used and purchased by each user or the country has to prepare more suitable files.

For all other countries, translation into a national language is based on a translation rights agreement. Translation rights are granted to a national organization. There is no charge for the translation rights. In most cases these countries offer files which can be used in an electronic environment.

Scenarios for a future policy

At present there are three possible scenarios for a future policy:

ICD-10 related products should be in the public domain

Pros:

1. Files in the public domain in a suitable data format stimulate the use of the classification (German experience: up to 1000 downloads per month).
2. There is no need to set up an infrastructure for distribution and accounting.
3. If an infrastructure has to be set up, the charges for the classification usually do not cover the costs for the infrastructure – or the charges become too high. (German experience)
4. Charges prohibit the use of the classification (German experience: before putting ICD-10 into the public domain, less than hundred copies per year were sold.)
5. A version which can be consulted via the INTERNET free of charge can be used as a reference file. Such a version could be a read-only file (e.g. in pdf format).

Cons:

1. It is hard to see software houses or publishing companies earn much money on something that you give away for free.
2. ICD-10 might be modified without control of WHO
3. The sale of ICD-10 is a considerable source of money for WHO

ICD-10 related products should be sold by a commercial company

Pros:

1. A more efficient marketing might lead to higher sales rates
2. There is no need to set up an infrastructure for distribution and accounting
3. A company might produce and sell a value-added product, e.g. more suitable for data processing or with a user interface for searching.

Cons:

1. Only part of the revenues will flow back to WHO (German experience: 10 to 20%)
2. Control of the revenues might be difficult
3. WHO would have to evaluate value-added products

ICD-10 related products should be sold by WHO directly

Pros:

1. Full revenues flow back to WHO
2. Revenues can be used to support WHO work
3. Companies that earn a lot of money on ICD should pay licence fees
4. An infrastructure for distribution and accounting is available
5. ICD-10 is a bestseller and an important source of money for WHO

Cons:

1. Is the revenue used to support ICD-related work at WHO or is it used for other projects?
2. Royalties are an obstacle to the use of the classification, as they have to be paid by each single user who orders the floppy disks.

Recommendation

1. The most current version of ICD-10 should be available on the INTERNET free of charge in a file format that cannot be edited and not be used for value-added products (e.g. the Folio views version or a pdf file).
2. Taking into account the scarce resources at WHO for ICD, revenues from the sale of ICD-10 should be used to support the work on ICD and not to support the work on other projects.
3. ICD should be distributed on floppy disks in an additional format more suitable for data processing or integration into computer applications