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INTERVIEW WITH

**DON SWEETE, CEO
SNOMED INTERNATIONAL**

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**INTERVIEW WITH DON SWEETE,
CEO SNOMED INTERNATIONAL**

SNOMED CT

**A POWERFUL TOOL FOR MODERN
CLINICAL TERMINOLOGY**

The CEO of the organization refers to the growth of this global standard for health terms, which is currently used by over 90 countries; he analyses benefits for the different stakeholders and explains the latest news.



Health information digitization using medical terminology is an essential component of integration in any modern health system. There is no way to codify medical data in order to effectively build a digital health environment. According to Don Sweete's description, SNOMED CT is a powerful and modern clinical terminology system, addressing key requirements for controlled clinical terminology, with an overarching scope, covering a broad range of information to be recorded in a health registry. He stresses it "focuses on representing clinical meanings, instead of simply providing a long list of terms and codes".

Going into further detail, Sweete explained that SNOMED CT supports the development of high- quality, comprehensive clinical content, provides a standardized way of representing clinical phrases captured by the physician, and allows their automatic interpretation.

"The main value proposal for using clinical terminology is the use, exchange, retrieval and analysis of clinical information to ensure unequivocal communication of patient records among physicians and medical centres." Sweete continued to state that, "although SNOMED CT also has a variety of other uses within the health care information infrastructure, the core feature is

that it is a clinical terminology designed to contribute to the development of effective electronic health records.

When interviewed by **Salud Digital**, Sweete clarified that this is only part of the





solution, as the true challenge lies in having meaningful health records: “It allows us to identify significant events in a data deluge, enabling effective retrieval and linking the electronic patient record to clinical knowledge, providing overall clinical decision support. This is what SNOMED CT offers to health systems worldwide”, he highlighted.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AHEAD

With regards to new developments for 2019, participation among the Community of Practice is still the organization’s main approach: “We continue broadening the SNOMED CT footprint and SNOMED CT is

now used in over 90 countries through affiliation, development and collaboration licences”, he reported.

“With genomics, precision medicine, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data ready to have an impact on health care in the next two years, sharing standardized data can accelerate the process of patient care, and the discovery of new treatments for rare and complex diseases.”

Furthermore, at our recent business meetings in London last April, the organization announced delivery of a GLOBAL PATIENT SET to be launched





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EXPLORATION OF WOUND OF SKIN

next September. It is a controlled collection of existing SNOMED CT concepts and established reference sets, available for users at no cost.

“Why are we moving along this path? SNOMED International is releasing the GLOBAL PATIENT SET to allow use of structured clinical data without any barriers and in support of interoperability. For some, it can provide a starting point to migrate towards the use of SNOMED CT. For those countries that are considering the possibility of becoming members, the GLOBAL PATIENT SET will give them a certain level of use and exposure to SNOMED CT, without the need for upfront investment. This can support a growing target audience in Latin America interested in the above, as the use of SNOMED CT broadens and there is growing interest”, explained Sweete.

With genomics, precision medicine, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data ready to have an impact on health care in the next two years, sharing standardized data can accelerate the process of patient care and the discovery of new treatments for rare and complex diseases. “Alliances and partnerships with global genomics organizations, as well as with the tech giants in the industry will be an important step forward to extend the presence of SNOMED CT as a valuable facilitator in this field”, he asserted.

BENEFITS

The purpose of achieving better outcomes for patients, the population at large and health systems globally are among the main benefits of using SNOMED CT. From the patient’s standpoint, clinical terminology ensures that any medication dose or measurement, test results or

warnings on allergies are the same in participating systems, thus impacting patient safety.

SNOMED CT adds value to electronic patient records in several ways, for instance, by benefiting individual patients and physicians, as well as general patient populations.

With regard to national, regional and local health care providers, and the emerging user environment in Latin America, SNOMED CT allows health information systems to share meaningful clinical data, supporting profitable, high-quality health care. Regarding effective communication through electronic patient records, the SNOMED CT application serves as a semantic foundation for exchanging clinical data, offering the capacity of transferring information electronically across organizations,

while maintaining the meaning of the exchanged information.

Sweete maintains that “through the mutual provision of clinical data from disparate health information systems, a health organization may not only offer timely medical treatment, reduce costs and make the most of medical resources, but also provide for consistency and accessibility to patients’ health information; thus, ensuring continuity of the treatment, reducing doctor’s mistakes and improving the quality, safety and efficiency of health services.”

It is important to bear in mind that SNOMED CT also provides value to our IT suppliers and developers. Strategic benefits for the vendor community range from their competitiveness and sales on international markets,



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DISEASE
OUTBREAK

BIOGRAPHY

Don Sweete joined SNOMED International in 2014, bringing with him over 30 years' leadership in the industry and experience in executive management. Since then, SNOMED International has transitioned its brand to become more closely aligned with its main product. As a CEO, he works with governance bodies at all levels of the organization to guide and manage SNOMED International's corporate strategy, and is in charge of all facets of the business, from product content, technical support, customer relationship management through to the organization's enabling corporate functions. Since he joined the organization, he has worked to grow the Member-base, customers and partners globally through an enhanced strategy and vision.

through to meeting the expectations of GPs and customers, and retaining existing clients.

INTEGRATION WITH HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

SNOMED CT encompasses strategic, technical and practical implementation stages. He explained that "from a strategic viewpoint, the decision of adopting SNOMED CT at a national, organization, project or provider level often times calls for the establishment of a policy or strategic plan. Planning implementation entails a sound understanding of the objectives, dependencies and realistic time frames, how SNOMED CT will be used in clinical systems, and whether a clinical system must be developed, upgraded or purchased to meet specific needs."

He adds, "from a technical standpoint, whether it is a matter of specifying and procuring, or designing and developing, it is important to ensure that SNOMED CT is properly implemented in clinical systems, which includes appropriate customization of terminology to local requirements, efficient user interfaces, consistent information structures, effective



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PROVISION OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH CARE

communication, and optimized retrieval and consultation.”

Lastly, from the standpoint of the practical implementation stage, he asserts that “a successful implementation and use thereof needs the support of key stakeholders, sufficient user training and adequate resources to ensure ongoing operation of the clinical systems and clinical terminology throughout time.”

Implementation by its Members has allowed the organization to prioritise the allocation of significant resources to developing the SNOMED CT toolkit, which includes the commitment of developing and providing educational resources for the SNOMED CT experience at world level. Sweete reported that “our teams often visit Members appointed National Release Centres to organize practical sessions and plan subsequent clinical

and technical sessions.”

PLANS FOR LATIN AMERICA

Sweete pointed to the region’s great momentum this past year, with Argentina and Brazil having joined in the first half of 2018, while Uruguay joined the organization in 2012. The CEO stated that “our efforts to extend SNOMED CT implementation and related benefits will continue in the region.”

He concluded by saying that “at present, we are also look to explore interest in active regional countries such as Costa Rica and Colombia. As we welcome new members, we continue our commitment to our regional approach, through which we support the use and implementation of SNOMED CT, by connecting regional stakeholders to harness the successful learning process.”