

September 29, 2022

Important update to AJCC USCDI ONDEC submission

The American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC) would like to provide an important update on the Cancer Staging (AJCC TNM), AJCC T Category, AJCC N Category, AJCC M Category, and AJCC Stage Group data elements originally submitted to USCDI ONDEC on October 23, 2020.

The American College of Surgeons and SNOMED International entered into a license agreement to allow AJCC data elements to be included in the SNOMED CT terminology. Provided below are links to the announcements from both organizations.

- <https://www.snomed.org/news-and-events/articles/SNOMED-ACS-AJCC-licensing-agreement>
- <https://www.facs.org/for-medical-professionals/news-publications/news-and-articles/press-releases/2022/ajcc-cancer-staging-content-in-snomed-ct/>

The license agreement is an important development for the AJCC's USCDI ONDEC submission and therefore the AJCC is requesting a review of the Classification Level assigned based in this new information.

The AJCC data elements are now accessible in SNOMED CT and there is no license fee for use of SNOMED CT in the United States. Furthermore, the AJCC data elements available in SNOMED CT are now accurate, up to date and will be maintained going forward by the AJCC in collaboration with SNOMED International. This will provide stakeholders and builders of production environments the AJCC data elements in the standardized terminology of SNOMED CT which is already widely implemented in healthcare systems. The accessibility to these data elements will contribute to interoperability of cancer data for patients, providers, cancer registries, and researchers.

Amendments to USCDI ONDEC Submission

Several sections of the original ONDEC submission are impacted by this positive development. The comments below provide updated information and context to the applicable sections affected by the availability of the AJCC data elements in SNOMED CT.

USE CASE DESCRIPTION

Link to use case project page:

The updated link for the project page is <https://www.facs.org/quality-programs/cancer-programs/american-joint-committee-on-cancer/>

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MATURITY

Applicable Standards:

- SNOMED International, Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT®) U.S. Edition, September 2022 Release
<https://browser.ihtsdotools.org/?perspective=full&conceptId1=1222584008&editon=MAIN/2022-08-31&release=&languages=en>

In the original submission it stated that the existing AJCC data elements were outdated and that the structure in which these elements were represented in SNOMED was not a fit for the regular updates to AJCC content. All of these issues have been resolved through the collaborative efforts of SNOMED International and the AJCC.

The AJCC worked with SNOMED International to build the AJCC data elements in a new and sustainable taxonomy that will be updated regularly. SNOMED inactivated the outdated AJCC concepts and will redirect users to the current data elements in SNOMED CT.

Additional Specifications:

The additional specifications provided in the initial submission are still mostly relevant. However, the availability of T,N,M and Stage as SNOMED CT concept IDs will likely lead to many of these specifications utilizing the SNOMED codes directly since they will be maintained and updated in collaboration with the AJCC.

Current Use:

The T,N,M and Stage data elements have been used and managed independently across various EHR environments and databases for over a decade. However, with these data elements now available in SNOMED CT as of September 2022, it is anticipated that SNOMED CT is where users will go to access the standardized data elements maintained by the AJCC and SNOMED. There will no longer be a need to manage these data elements independently across different specifications but rather reference the SNOMED concept IDs directly as a centralized source of truth.

Supporting Artifacts:

In the original submission, the potential for improving the standardization of the data elements to be exchanges across EHR systems was mentioned. This is now possible with AJCC data elements available, accessible, and up to date in SNOMED CT.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Restrictions on Standardization:

With the AJCC data elements now available in SNOMED CT it has removed any challenge of restrictions on standardization.

Restrictions on Use:

The agreement to allow AJCC data elements in SNOMED CT has removed the challenge of Restrictions on Use. The agreement between AJCC and SNOMED has made it possible for any entity with the right to use SNOMED CT to have the right to use the AJCC data elements where they are now standardized and maintained within the SNOMED CT terminology. This access to accurate AJCC data elements will foster exchange of these data elements across different production environments and support interoperability efforts.

Estimate of Overall Burden:

The previously low level of burden has been further reduced because the AJCC data elements are now available in SNOMED CT. The use of the AJCC data elements was already ubiquitous across cancer care and research. Now that there is a centralized and accessible source for these data elements with SNOMED CT, it will significantly improve the exchange of these data elements for EHRs and other production environments. It removes the burden of needing to maintain and update these AJCC data elements locally in each system. Instead, users of the AJCC data elements may simply reference SNOMED CT where these codes will be maintained and updated with the AJCC.

Concluding Comments

The AJCC requests that the USCDI reviewers reconsider the Classification Level of the AJCC data elements based on the recent development of a license agreement that will make the AJCC data elements accessible from the SNOMED CT terminology. The AJCC feels that the availability of the AJCC data elements in a standard terminology that is freely available and in wide use significantly strengthens the original submission and demonstrates previous challenges have been addressed.

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