

Patient Confidentiality

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1. Background

The World Health Organizations' International Classification of Diseases version 10 (ICD10) is a diagnostic coding standard that was adopted by the National Health Information System of South Africa (NHISSA) in 1996 as the coding standard of choice for South Africa. ICD10 codes are clinical diagnostic codes detailing the diagnosis of the health encounter between the patient and the health professional and/or the health facility. A dilemma exists between the Ethical Rulings of Providers of Care to keep all clinically related information concerning a patient private and confidential versus the statutory obligations to release such clinical information in the form of the ICD10 codes. In order to resolve the uncertainty surrounding patient confidentiality in relation to the ICD10 codes, the National ICD10 Task Team formed the Patient Confidentiality Subcommittee in March 2006.

2. Participants of the Subcommittee

Participants included members of the various statutory councils e.g. Health Professions Council of South Africa, Department of Health, the Council of Medical Schemes and other interested parties.

3. Terms of Reference

This subcommittee has been tasked to document a Framework, which will assure the Health Professionals that, by documenting the ICD10 codes, this Personal Health Information in the form of ICD10 codes will be kept confidential and secured.

4. Framework Document

Purpose of the use of ICD10 codes includes Patient Access to health care in the private sector, as well as Improvement of efficiency of healthcare through easy storage, retrieval and analysis of information for patient care, research, performance improvement, healthcare planning and facility management. Identifiable patient's health data in the form of ICD10 codes flows from the providers and facilities, via Data Companies to Medical Scheme. The people involved in the above data chain include both health and non-healthcare personnel. Providers are to obtain a written consent from the patient before submitting their ICD10 data. Providers are also to insert the ICD10 codes on prescriptions, referrals and discharge summaries in order for the other members of the Health Care Team who do not consult with the patient directly, to insert the correct ICD10 codes when submitting their data. Security of the personal health information is a vital component of confidentiality. The framework will include both ethical rules and statutory requirements.

5. Conclusion

This document will enable the Health Professionals to participate fully and comprehensively with the knowledge that their patient's identifiable data will be secure.