

**Health Level Seven, Inc**  
and the  
**International Health Terminology Standards  
Development Organization, Inc.**  
**Associate Charter Agreement**

This Associate Charter Agreement shall become effective on the Effective Date written below and is between:

Health Level Seven, Inc. (HL7)  
3300 Washtenaw Avenue, Suite 227  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104-4261

and

International Health Terminology Standards Development Organization Inc. (IHTSDO)  
Rued Langgaards Vej 7, 5A56  
2300 Copenhagen S  
Denmark

Effective Date: April 3, 2009

## **1. Purpose and Mission**

The purpose of this agreement is to support the adoption of working practices that facilitate the use of IHTSDO standards with HL7 standards in general and specifically the incorporation of SNOMED CT terminology in the HL7 models and artifacts derived from the HL7 Reference Information Model. These working practices shall be complementary to the ISO/TC215 Joint Initiative on SDO Global Health Informatics Standardization, which both organizations have committed to support

Both organizations shall work effectively to avoid duplication and reduce ambiguities and gaps between their standards; and facilitate the use of tooling that works across organizational boundaries.

The mission of the IHTSDO is to develop, maintain, promote and enable the uptake and correct use of SNOMED CT and other terminology products in health systems, services and products around the world. The IHTSDO seeks to improve the health of humankind by fostering the development and use of suitable standardized clinical terminologies, notably SNOMED CT.

The mission of HL7 is to provide reliable standards for the exchange, management and integration of data that support clinical patient care and the management, delivery and evaluation of healthcare services. HL7 encourages the creation of flexible, cost-effective approaches,

standards, guidelines, methodologies, and related services for the interoperability of healthcare information systems.

## 2. Coordination

Each organization shall appoint a liaison, typically an officer who can speak for their respective organization, who shall meet by telephone as required for coordinating joint projects and sharing information regarding activities of mutual interest. With the agreement of both liaisons, others may be invited to participate in these calls.

The scope and activities of the Work Groups within each organization shall be generally available. Where and when appropriate, the liaisons shall be responsible for establishing links between Work Groups of each organizations.

With the consensus of the governing bodies upon request by the liaisons and subject to the rules of the hosting organization, representatives from one organization may attend the Working Group Meetings of the other organization.

## 3. Resolution of Gaps, Overlaps, and Ambiguities

**Prioritization of Work:** Gaps, overlaps, and ambiguities shall be resolved based on the implementation priorities of each member country using the standards. The liaisons shall work to ensure equitable resolution of any conflicts of implementation priority between the various member countries.

**Resolution of Gaps:** Gaps are the result of SNOMED CT concepts not being available for use in HL7 information models or HL7 information models not being capable of carrying SNOMED CT concepts in a manner supporting clinical use. HL7 and the IHTSDO are committed to reducing, if not eliminating, such gaps. This may be accomplished by the development of new SNOMED CT concepts or the revision of HL7 information models to make use of existing concepts. Such actions shall make optimal use of existing change mechanisms available to the organizations; however each organization is committed to improving existing response times to better meet implementation timescales.

**Resolution of Overlaps:** Overlaps are the result of concepts being modeled in different ways; for example, as a pre-coordinated concept in SNOMED CT; as a post coordinated concept; or using multiple elements within an HL7 information model. HL7 and the IHTSDO are committed to resolving overlaps. This may be accomplished through the development of guidance identifying how a particular type of concept should be carried using SNOMED CT codes in HL7 artifacts. Options could include pre-coordinated expressions within SNOMED CT; post coordinated expressions using the SNOMED CT Compositional Grammar; and revision of the HL7 information model. Where it is not possible to constrain the solution to a single recommended pattern, resolution could involve the creation of rules or transforms that permit safe and reliable inter-conversion of differing optional patterns. Ultimately, where a strong argument can be supported for representational overlaps being managed exclusively by either HL7 or the IHTSDO, it is envisioned that such representations would be fully supported in that standard and fully deprecated in the other.

**Resolution of Ambiguities:** An ambiguity arises when either a SNOMED CT concept is used inconsistently within an HL7 information model, or a SNOMED CT concept is used inconsistently between HL7 information models, or SNOMED CT provides multiple representations of a single concept. When identified, such ambiguities shall be reported to the appropriate organization for resolution.

**Build on Existing Work:** Resolutions shall build upon any existing work performed in resolving gaps, overlaps, and ambiguities; e.g. rules for binding terminology to an information model. Preference shall be given to any resolution with demonstrated functionality or that has been adopted in a large-scale implementation.

**Promote Consistency:** HL7 and the IHTSDO shall publicize and promote the rules, guidelines, and procedures resulting from this approach.

#### **4. Responding to Issues**

Each organization shall provide an accessible entry point(s) for the other to register questions on, issue with, or requested changes to artifacts managed by that organization.

Whenever possible, each organization shall take advantage of the submission mechanisms available to the members of the other organization thus ensuring prompt recognition of the issue and initiation of appropriate corrective measures.

The liaisons shall intervene and seek a response to any issues that cannot be resolved in a reasonably timely manner by existing processes.

Open issues shall be a standing agenda item for the regular joint coordination meetings.

#### **5. Common Approach to Tooling**

HL7 and the IHTSDO will work with other standards organizations on a common approach for tooling to support standards development, maintenance, and implementation and facilitate the use of such tooling by their members.

Each organization shall support interoperability in the short term and strive for convergent tooling platforms in the longer term; this includes:

- Provision of standard application programming interfaces (API) allowing integration of the tooling platforms. In line with common practice, each API will be defined and maintained by the supplier of a service in conjunction with consumers of that service.

- Review of the use of common technologies in tooling, where appropriate

- Exchange experience on Open Source Licensing arrangements for tooling which facilitate the use of such tools by members, Affiliates, and others.

Where differing APIs perform essentially the same purpose, HL7 and the IHTSDO will consider, under separate agreement, exchanging information on the APIs to enable better interoperability of the tooling.

#### **6. Cross Participation**

Members of HL7 and the IHTSDO are encouraged to attend the Working Group Meetings of each organization. Funding for such attendance shall be the responsibility of the attendee.

#### **7. Obligations and Exclusions**

This agreement does not impart any ownership rights to Trademarks or standards.

There shall be no exchange of mailing lists or membership information as a result of this agreement.

The ownership of resources; the development and management of work plans; the approval processes, or any other processes appropriately adopted by either organization are not altered by this agreement.

The agreement does not imply exclusivity on either side, or prioritization of requests from one organization over others. It is expected that both organizations will work with other standards bodies for the good of their member organizations.

#### **8. Termination**

This agreement shall remain in effect for five years or until terminated by either organization following 30-day written notice.

Authorized Signatures:

**HEALTH LEVEL SEVEN, INC.**

**INTERNATIONAL HEALTH  
TERMINOLOGY STANDARDS  
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION, INC.**

Signed:


  
Charles Jaffe, MD, PhD  
CEO, HL7

Signed:



Jennifer Zelmer  
CEO, IHTSDO

Signed:

  
Mark McDougall  
Executive Director, HL7



Martin Severs  
Chair, IHTSDO Management Board