SNOMED CT Hierarchies

SNOMED CT concepts are organised into 19 distinct hierarchies. When selecting a term it helps to understand to which hierarchy the concept belongs. Below is a table explaining details about some of the key hierarchies.

Top Level Hierarchy	Description	Examples	Semantic tags
Clinical finding	Represents the diagnosis and symptoms of the patient.	Asthma (disorder), Headache (finding), Normal breath sounds (finding), Tired all the time (finding)	(finding), (disorder)
Procedure	Represents activities performed in the provision of health care. Includes not only invasive procedures but also administration of medicines, imaging, education, therapies and administrative procedures.	Appendectomy (procedure), Cervical epidural steroid injection (procedure), Education about thrombolytic therapy (procedure), Smoking cessation drug therapy (regime/therapy)	(procedure), (regime/therapy)
Observable entity	Represents a question or assessment which can produce an answer or result.	Systolic arterial pressure (observable entity), Gender (observable entity), Colour of urine (observable entity), Glomerular filtration rate (observable entity)	(observable entity)
Situation with explicit context	Represents concepts in which the clinical context is specified as part of the definition of the concept itself. These include presence or absence of a condition, whether a clinical finding is current, in the past or relates to someone other than the subject of the record.	History of drug dependency (situation), Family history: Myocardial infarction (situation), Medication review done by pharmacist (situation)	(situation)
Body structure	Represents normal and abnormal anatomical structures.	Mitral valve structure (body structure), Verruca (morphologic abnormality), Left upper arm structure (body structure), T lymphocyte (cell)	(body structure), (morphologic abnormality) (cell)
Social Context	Contains social conditions and circumstances significant to healthcare. Includes family and economic status, ethnic and religious heritage, and life style and occupations.	Economic status (social concept) , Caucasian (ethnic group) , Clerical supervisor (occupation) , Thief (life style), Judaism (religion/philosophy)	(social concept) (person) (ethnic group) (racial group) (religion/philosophy) (occupation) (life style)
Event	Represent occurrences that result in injury Excludes all procedures and interventions.	Flash flood (event) Motor vehicle accident (event)	(event)
Substance	Represents general substances, the ingredients of drug products, body substances, dietary substances and diagnostic substances.	Amoxicillin (substance), Lanolin (substance), Dust (substance), Gluten (substance), Albumin (substance)	(substance)
Pharmaceutical / biologic product	Represents drug products.	Amoxycillin 250mg capsule (product), Aspirin (product), Co-codamol 8mg/500mg tablet (product), Rituximab (product)	(product)

Note. The semantic tags appear at the end of the Fully Specified Name of a SNOMED CT description.

SNOMED CT Starter Guide (Chapter 6) has further information about SNOMED CT concepts and the full list of top level hierarchies.

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