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Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C St SW, Floor 7
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Representing Patient Tobacco Use (Smoking Status)

Dear Colleagues,

The Tobacco Treatment Program at the Medical University of South Carolina appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Interoperability Standards Advisory (ISA) process for representing patient tobacco use. We commend the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) on their commitment to ensuring the ISA process facilitates interoperability for clinical, public health, and research purposes. It is our hope that smoking status can be more documented in Electronic Health Records (EHR) in a way that provides more consistency to allow for interoperability and streamlines categories to reduce confusion and improve providers' workflow.

One concern with the Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT) EHR smoking status classification is that the categories are open to interpretation and importantly are not mutually exclusive which adds confusion to the process of correctly classifying patients smoking status. The current value set includes:

Current every day smoker
Current some day smoker
Former smoker
Never smoker
Smoker, current status unknown
Unknown if ever smoked
Heavy tobacco smoker
Light tobacco smoker

The overlap in values, lack of definitions for categories that are open to interpretation (e.g., light and heavy smoker), and risk of different interpretations of the record between different healthcare settings reduces the potential for tobacco use data to be organized, queried, and analyzed for the benefit of individuals, institutions, and populations.

To address overlap and interpretation challenges, we propose ONC address the following through the ISA process:

1. **Simplify the smoking status choices/classifications.**
2. **Remove overlapping smoking status classifications.**

We recommend adoption of the following simplified categories:

Current Every Day Smoker
Current Some Day Smoker
Former Smoker
Never Smoker
Smoking Status Unknown

A second concern has to do with fully capturing smoking status in a meaningful way to direct interventions to those who are current smokers. We have found that asking a follow-up question of CURRENT and FORMER smokers beyond the one recommended above, improves capture by about 25% of those who may be in need of help with quitting and remaining off cigarettes.

ASK OF CURRENT AND FORMER SMOKERS:
When did you last smoke a cigarette (even one or two puffs)?
- I smoked a cigarette today (at least one puff)
- 1 to 7 days ago
- 8 days to 1 month ago
- More than 1 month ago to 1 year ago
- More than 1 year ago
- Don't know/don't remember

Thank you for considering our input on this important issue. These comments are based on careful discussion by members of our Tobacco Treatment Program. If we at MUSC can provide any additional information or assistance to ONC, please do not hesitate to contact Benjamin Toll, PhD, Professor of Public Health Sciences, at toll@musc.edu.

Sincerely,

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K. Michael Cummings, Ph.D.
Georges El Nahas, Ph.D.
Phil Smeltzer, Ph.D.
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Graham Warren, M.D., Ph.D.