

The use of ICPC in Portugal – status update 2012

Daniel Pinto

Department of Family Medicine - Nova Medical School, Lisbon

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ICPC is the official classification for primary care in the Portuguese National Health Service. Almost every family doctor has access to an EHR that uses ICPC to classify reasons for encounter, problems and process. EHRs must use ICPC coding to be authorized for use in primary care. Hospital referrals are also coded with ICPC. Private practices and insurance companies (outside the NHS) do not use ICPC, but represent a very small fraction of primary care in Portugal.

Most, but not all, family medicine residents receive a short (<1 day) training on ICPC use in clinical practice, but many older doctors still struggle with the classification. No new studies on classification accuracy have been published. There have been some editorials published in the Portuguese Journal of General and Family Medicine on a trend (anecdotal, this has not been accurately documented) of some doctors to replace free text in their records by ICPC codes for the S and P components of the follow up notes in the medical record.^{1,2,3} This is seen by most national experts as unwanted, since 1) the accuracy is probably very low (as these doctors seem to confuse the follow up notes structure in the problem oriented medical record with the ability of ICPC to code reasons for encounter, problems and procedures; they are coding every symptom, instead of reasons for encounter; they disregard the patient agenda; procedures granularity does not allow for much of the needed detail) and 2) individual patient information is lost as ICPC codes are used instead of free text.

ICPC is used by the Ministry of Health to monitor productivity in primary care and measure quality and performance indicators.

The Portuguese Association of General and Family Medicine and the Portuguese Health Ministry have cooperated to produce a new book updating the translation to ICPC-2ev3.0, which has been published and is available at http://www.acss.min-saude.pt/Portals/0/apmcp_ICPC%20v%201.7.pdf.

Note: Please see the report submitted in 2011 for further details.

¹ Braga R. Os registos clínicos e a codificação. Rev Port Med Geral Fam 2012;28:155-6.

² Melo M. O uso da ICPC nos registos clínicos em Medicina Geral e Familiar. Rev Port Med Geral Fam 2012;28:245-6.

³ Pinto D. Classificar motivos de consulta e procedimentos com a ICPC na prática clínica? Rev Port Med Geral Fam 2012;28:247-8