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Abstract: In most countries of the world vital and health statistics have, from the beginning of this year, been classified in accordance with a new revision of International Classification of Diseases (ICD). This revision, the ninth (ICD-9), is available in several languages in two volumes: the tabular list and the index. Although t
categories has been increased by 90, its main structure is very similar to previous revisions but it contains many innovations coincident upon the need to exploit the potential of flexibility arising from the proliferation of data-retrieval systems in recent years. Many of the changes are particularly appropriate to the use of the ICD for coding morbidity statistics, and include the basis of dual classification by aetiology and manifestation ("daggers and asterisks") and for the first time a set of rules for the selection of a single cause for such applications as the collection of data related to admissions to hospital. One further aspect worthy of note is a recommendation for enhanced information on maternal and perinatal mortality, advocating a form of "perinatal death certificate" - a recommendation that for civil registration reasons it may be possible to implement in many countries.

What particularly characterizes this revision is that the opportunity has been taken to make available more detailed extensions of the system of disease classification and also to encompass related statistical areas. In 1974 WHO issued a glossary of mental disorders designed to improve the international comparability of mental health statistics and this, updated (7), is now incorporated within the mental disorders chapter (V) of ICD-9. It is also published separately, with a detailed index and an introduction of general as well as specific interest. The needs of oncology for a classification based on the topography, morphology and behaviour of tumours are met by a further volume (ICD-O) which provides a coding system based on all these axes and which is compatible with ICD-9. WHO have also issued a supplementary classification for use in dentistry and stomatology (3).

There has also been a change in the suggested method of presentation of statistics, with a new combined list of causes forming a basic tabulation list. The composition is included in ICD-9 volume 1 and also as a separate volume with an index (4). This volume is primarily intended for the production of vital statistics in those countries where the full detail of the ICD is not required or as an index to tabulated output. One possible danger of this particular volume is that occasional users may fail to realize that the numbers referred to in its index are those of the basic tabulation list and not ICD numbers.

As well as enhancing the system of coding diseases, this revision coincides with the appearance of two volumes of an international classification of procedures in medicine. The first volume (5) includes sets of codes for diagnostic, laboratory and preventive procedures, as well as for operations and other therapeutic procedures. The second volume (6) provides a classification of radiology, radiotherapy, drugs, medicinal and biological agents. All these classifications are based on the best information available internationally and provide a wealth of detail suitable for statistical analysis; use of abbreviated codes should also be helpful in surveys or if objectives are...
limited.

If all that is now made available by WHO is used to the full, both internationally and nationally, then 1979 should be an important milestone along the road of disease classification and vital statistics.

(1) WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. *Mental disorders: glossary and guide to classification in accordance with the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases*. 96 pp. 1978. [ISBN 92 4 154137 7] [Sw.fr. 12.-].


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