Clarification of license conditions to allow extension builders to modify the international content.

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Executive Summary

This paper serves as a clarification of what extension builders (Extensions) are allowed to do in relation to international content within SNOMED CT. Clause 4.1 of the SNOMED CT® AFFILIATE LICENSE AGREEMENT states:

> *"Subject to clause 2.1.4, the Licensee may not modify any part of the SNOMED CT Core distributed as part of the International Release or as part of a Member's National Release."*

It is unanimously agreed that RF2 distribution should not be altered by Extensions, beyond appending additional content. Discussions within the Member Forum in 2015 agreed that the above clause should not prohibit Extensions from adding or retiring relationships to core concepts or changing the definition status.

Whether or not changes to the license are required to clarify the clause, specifically what is meant by "modify", is unknown. However, documented confirmation from IHTSDO to the community of practice would provide assurance to license holders. Communication through the Member Form and perhaps Technical Implementation Guide may be sufficient.
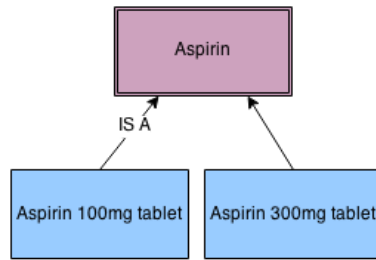
Changes to concept definitions are allowed within RF2 Extensions, provided they:

- Are published on an extension module (and compliant with RF2);
- Do not conflict with the Fully Specified Name;
- Are intended to improve the machine definition and overall quality of SNOMED CT-AU.
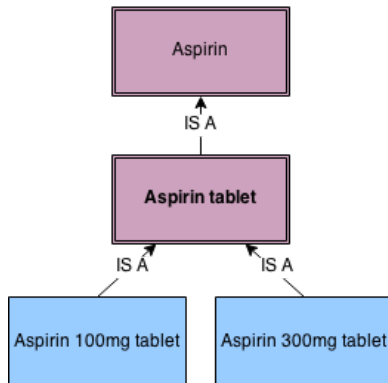
Background

It had long been believed by many (but not all) Members that the machine definitions of core concepts (relationships and definition state) could not be altered in any way. This places a significant restriction upon the type of content that extension builders can create. Specifically, all extension concepts must be always both primitive and terminal within the taxonomy (leaf concepts).
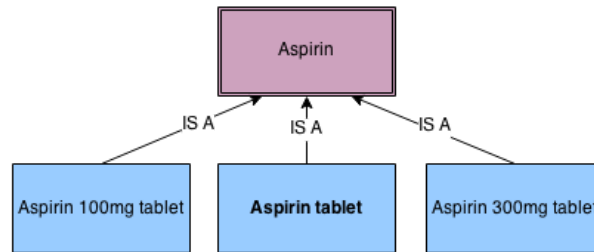
International Release (hypothetical)

Aspirin
- IS A — Aspirin 100mg tablet
- Aspirin 300mg tablet

Extension Release (prohibited)

Aspirin
- IS A — Aspirin tablet
  - IS A — Aspirin 100mg tablet
  - IS A — Aspirin 300mg tablet

Extension Release (allowed)

Aspirin
- IS A — Aspirin 100mg tablet
- IS A — Aspirin tablet
- IS A — Aspirin 300mg tablet

The extension concept must also remain primitive, because future international releases may include new content that would may get subsumed upon classification.

When the topic was raised at the Member Forum, several things became apparent.

- Recognition of the restriction seemed limited (but unanimous) to native english speaking countries. This is assumed to be due to some implied interpretation of the language used.
- The restriction was valid in respect to the original (RF1) release format. However, RF2 has a more comprehensive history tracking mechanism that allows such changes to be made, whilst retaining the original core history.

In addition to the creation of extension concepts, members may have a requirement to improve the machine definitions of core content to address quality concerns and/or local implementation demands.

Conclusion

The conclusion derived from consultation was that Extensions should be allowed to modify (add and retire) the relationships of core concepts and change the definition status. Unless such an allowance is made, Extensions are unable to create defined concepts, produce valid Distribute Normal Form (DNF) releases, address pressing quality issues, and respond to local implementation demands. To avoid future confusion or doubt. Clarification should be included within the Technical Implementation Guide and/or other appropriate documentation.