2.1. Using text searches and subtype hierarchy navigation

Selection in a browser

The starting point for a consideration of data entry is an efficient method for performing text searches and subtype hierarchy navigation. When these functions are integrated in a terminology browser, it is possible to select a Concept by text search and then to refine or generalize the selection to identify a more appropriate Concept for recording.

A terminology browser built into an application or offering a programmable interface can be used to allow a user to select a Concept (and/or Description) and enter this into a record.

This method of data entry allows unconstrained selection of any Concept from SNOMED CT . This can sometimes be useful but such an unrestricted method should only be used as a fallback, when more selective approaches cannot be used.

Limitations of simple browsers

A general-purpose browser capable of searching and navigating through the SNOMED CT hierarchy is a simple starting point. However, this approach is unlikely to meet the requirements for anything other than occasional entry of SNOMED CT encoded information. More selective mechanisms tailored to particular data entry contexts are likely to be more usable and may promote more consistent data recording.

In most situations in which clinical data is entered, access to the full content of SNOMED CT through a simple search and hierarchy browser is unlikely to be necessary and may be cumbersome and unhelpful. The main reason for this relates to the size and structure of the terminology. As a result:

- Many term may match a single word or short phrase resulting in a long list of options;
- The depth and breadth of the subtype hierarchy and navigation may require selection of choices from several screens to locate the required Concept .

There are many ways to improve and simplify SNOMED CT data entry. Some of these can be used in a wide range of situations. Others are specific to constrained contexts that occur in structured data entry driven by a template or protocol.