

Distr.
GENERAL

CES/AC.36/1998/25 (Summary)
EUR/ICP/INFO 020603/25
29 July 1998

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint ECE-WHO Meeting on Health Statistics
(Rome, Italy, 14-16 October 1998)

SESSION II: The role of IT in collecting health information

DATA PROTECTION IN RELATION TO HOSPITAL MEDICAL STATISTICS

Supporting paper submitted by the Health Section,
Swiss Federal Statistical Office

Summary

Application of the "data protection in relation to hospital statistics" concept enables the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) to preserve the privacy of hospital patients while fulfilling its statistical tasks. Technical features include:

Linkage code

The establishment of a uniform, anonymous linkage code for each hospital patient enables cases of re-hospitalization to be detected without endangering the anonymity of records. The linkage code is rendered anonymous by hashing followed by identifying-variable encryption.

Sensitive variables

The **birth date** is no longer systematically required. In principle, all that is noted are the birth year and the age in complete years. The complete date of birth is required, for epidemiological purposes, in the event of death and for children under the age of two years;

The **place of residence** is recorded as a region of approximately 10,000 inhabitants. The regions are proposed by the cantonal statistical offices and corresponds to the country's postal zones;

Nationality is required only for nationals of European countries. Group identifiers are used for non-Europeans.

Data transfer

For reasons of confidentiality, **data is encrypted** for electronic transmission.

Data dissemination

The competent **cantonal offices** receive all the data on the inhabitants of their canton. Individual data is occasionally made available, subject to conditions, to research workers. Other users received data in aggregated form.

Data storage

Linkage codes are destroyed after a period of 10 years. They are, however, preserved, for epidemiological purposes, in the cases of children aged under 15 years and adults aged over 64 years, as well as of a sub-group of the population aged between 15 and 64 years. The other medical statistical data is preserved sine die.

Professional secrecy

OFS officials and other persons coming into contact with the data have an obligation of **professional secrecy**. In OFS, only Health Section staff directly involved in the project have access to the database.
