A Cancer Registrar's Guide to Collecting Industry and Occupation

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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Importance of Collecting Industry and Occupation

Cancer prevention program planners and researchers rely on cancer registrars to record the best information possible on potential cancer risk factors, including potentially hazardous jobs held by cancer patients during their working life.

The usual (longest-held) occupation and industry of workers can reveal the national cancer burden by industry and occupation. Such information can also be used to help discover jobs that may have a high risk for cancer or other diseases and for which prevention efforts can be concentrated (or targeted).

Note

We understand that registrars are often limited by the amount and specificity of information recorded in the patient's medical record, but we hope that the enclosed tips will help you do the best you can with what you have to work with. Data entries like the examples described as "adequate" are always preferred to entries like those described as "inadequate," but "inadequate" data entries are acceptable when no other information is available. In this booklet we use the term *inadequate* to describe an entry that does not provide enough information for accurate coding of an industry or occupation according to standard classification systems.

Definitions

1- Patient's usual occupation

Type of job the patient was engaged in for the longest time.

It is not necessarily the highest paid job nor the job considered the most prestigious, but the one that accounted for the greatest number of working years.

Example: Registered nurse

2- Patient's usual industry

Type of business or industry where the patient worked in his or her usual occupation.

Example: Hospital

Completing Occupation Item

- **Be descriptive:** Record the word or words which most clearly describe the kind of work or type of duties performed by the patient.

  - *Inadequate:* “teacher”
  - *Adequate:* “preschool teacher,” “high school teacher”

- **Be specific:** General or vague terms are not adequate since they do not always provide enough information to code. Text field allows 100 characters.

  - *Inadequate:* “laborer”
  - *Adequate:* “residential bricklayer”

- **Be complete:** Occupation entries that give only the department or a place of work are inadequate.

  - *Inadequate*: “worked in a warehouse,”
    “worked in a shipping department”
  - *Adequate:* “warehouse forklift operator”

Additional Tips for Completing Occupation Item

These are examples of how general occupation descriptions can be made more specific:

General Occupation (Inadequate)	*Specific Occupation (Adequate)*
- Contractor	Building construction contractor
- Consultant	Computer database consultant
- Assembler	Aircraft engine assembler
- Technician	Civil engineering technician
- Laborer	Dairy farm laborer
- Engineer	Chemical engineer, railroad engineer

Some commonly confused occupations

Contractor vs. skilled worker

- A “contractor” mainly obtains contracts and supervises the work.
- A “skilled worker” works with his or her own tools as a carpenter, plasterer, plumber, or electrician.

Machine operator vs. machinist vs. mechanic

- A “machine operator” operates machines.
- A “machinist” sets up and operates machines.
- A “mechanic” repairs, installs, and adjusts machines.

Completing Industry Item

- **Be descriptive:** Record the primary activity carried on by the industry at the location where the patient was employed.

  - *Inadequate:* “automobile industry”
  - *Adequate:* “automobile manufacturing”

- **Be specific:** In order to give a clear and exact description of the industry, the entry must indicate both a general and specific function for the employer.

  - *Inadequate:* “manufacturing”
  - *Adequate:* “automobile manufacturing”

- **Be complete:** If the primary activity of the industry is unknown, record the name of the company (with city or town) in which the patient worked the most number of years before diagnosis.

  - *Inadequate:* “ABC, Inc.”
  - *Adequate:* “ABC, Inc., Los Angeles, CA”

Additional Tips for Completing Industry Item

These are examples of how general industry descriptions can be made more specific:

General Industry (Inadequate)	*Specific Industry (Adequate)*
Mine	Copper mine
Manufacturer	Automobile manufacturer
Wholesale	Wholesale grocery
Retail	Retail bookstore
Construction	Road construction
Repair service	Shoe repair service

Instructions for reporting government agencies

- Record the level: federal, state, county.
  Inadequate: "fire department"
  Adequate: "city fire department"

- Record the division of the agency, if available, to help clarify the specific activity of the patient.

- Use full name of division/agency.
  Inadequate: "Census"
  Adequate: "U.S. Census Bureau"

Special Case: Homemakers

- If patient worked only at home, then record:

  - Occupation: “homemaker”
  - Industry: “own home”

- If patient worked at someone else’s home for pay, then record:

  - Occupation: “housekeeper” (or “nurse,” “babysitter,” etc.)
  - Industry: “private home”

- If patient ever worked outside the home, then report corresponding occupation and industry for longest-held job outside the home. Do not report “homemaker” in such cases.

  Note: This is an exception to the rule that the occupation with the greatest number of years should be recorded as “usual” occupation.

Other Special Cases

Child

If the patient is under 14 years of age, then record:

- Occupation: “child”
- Industry: “child”

Student

If patient was a student at time of diagnosis and had never held a job, then record:

- Occupation: “student”
- Industry: type of school (“high school,” “college”)

Military

If patient was part of the military for most of his/her working life, then record:

- Occupation: “military”
- Industry: “military”

No other specifics (such as rank) are needed.

Never worked

If patient was not a student or homemaker and had never worked, then record:

- Occupation: “never worked”
- Industry: “none”

Unknown

"Unknown" should be entered only after you have tried your best to find job information in the medical record. It is better to enter "unknown" than to leave the field blank.

Business at a person's home

This should be reported in the same manner as regular business establishments.

- If work is in an office located in a private home, report the specific business. Do not report an individual's name as the employer.

  Inadequate: Occupation: "works from home"
  Industry: "O'Keefe, Brown, & Smith"

  Adequate: Occupation: "paralegal"
  Industry: "lawyer's office"

Common Incomplete Entries to Avoid

"Retired"

If retired, enter the kind of work patient did during most of his or her working life if this can be determined. (Do not add "retired".)

For example, record "plumber," not "retired plumber."

"Institutionalized," "Disabled," or "Unemployed"

Do not record such a description if patient was ever employed. Record longest-held occupation and industry.

"Self-employed"

If self-employed, specify the kind of work performed.

- *Inadequate:* Occupation: "self-employed"
- *Adequate:* Occupation: "self-employed auto mechanic"
  Industry: "automobile repair"

"Manager"

Record "manager" only if patient worked most of time managing a business, but include specifics in these cases.

- *Inadequate:* Occupation: "manager"
- *Adequate:* Occupation: "operations manager"
  Industry: "automobile manufacturing"

Examples of Proper Corresponding Entries

Make sure that the recorded usual occupation matches the recorded industry.

Occupation	*Business/Industry*
Timber cutter	Logging
Shoe designer	Leather footwear factory
Tire tester	Tire manufacturing
Petroleum analyst	Petroleum refining
Carpenter	Building construction
Carpet installer	Retail carpet sales and installation company
Registered nurse	Hospital
Miner	Coal mine
Mechanic, auto	Engine repair shop
Insurance agent	Life insurance company
Student	Junior college

Industry and Occupation Coding

NIOSH is charged with conducting occupational hazard and health surveillance to identify trends and assist in setting priorities for research and prevention activities. Since the late 1970s, NIOSH has collaborated with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the U.S. Census Bureau, other federal agencies, and state health departments to capture and code industry and occupation (I&O) on data records for surveillance of occupationally related diseases, injuries, and exposures.

For information about the classification systems used to code the industry and occupation text that you record, see the U.S. Census Bureau's Industry and Occupation Overview page at www.census.gov/hhes/www/ioindex/overview.html.

Notes

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