Finding Similar Drug Classes using RxClass

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Motivation
Drug classes constitute important information about the drugs and are critical to important use cases, such as clinical decision support (e.g., for allergy checking). Finding similar drug classes helps to identify important characteristics of drugs in different classification systems. RxClass, a web-based browser for drug classes, supports navigation between RxNorm drugs and drug classes from several sources (ATC, MeSH, DailyMed and NDF-RT), and allows users to explore similar classes.

Finding Similar Classes by Drug Membership
The RxClass application and its companion RxClass API offer functionality which allows users to retrieve similar classes relative to the selected class. Similar classes are defined here as classes which share a large proportion of drug members. The simple procedure for comparing two classes includes the following steps.

- Select a drug class (e.g., CALCIUM CHANNEL BLOCKERS (C08) in ATC) and display its members.
- Select the “similar classes” link above the list of drug members. A popup menu is displayed with the most similar classes (e.g., Calcium Channel Interactions in DailyMed). The class information along with the equivalence score is displayed for each similar class (here: 0.74).
- Select the “Venn” link to visualize shared vs. specific clinically significant drugs (ignoring base/salt distinctions) for the two classes as a Venn diagram, as well as a table. See figure 1.

In addition to retrieving similar classes for a given class, the RxClass API also supports the identification of classes from an arbitrary list of drug members (e.g., a drug value set).

Similarity Scoring
RxClass and the RxClass API similarity functions use equivalence and inclusion scores defined in prior work to find and rank similar classes. The equivalence score is based on the Jaccard coefficient (modified to lower the similarity of very small classes). The inclusion score identifies situations where a high similarity value is indicative of one class being included in the other.

Conclusions
Providing similar drug classes has been a missing piece of information in RxNav. With RxClass, we now provide a link between similar drug classes from various sources using its RxNorm drug membership.

RxClass is available from the main RxNav website (http://rxnav.nlm.nih.gov), along with additional information about RxNav and our APIs to various drug information sources.

Acknowledgments: This work was supported by the Intramural Research Program of the NIH, National Library of Medicine.

Figure 1. Sample screenshot of RxClass Similar Class Information