Author's response to reviews

Title: Addressing the deficiencies in the evidence-base for primary practice in regional Australia - Sentinel Practices Data Sourcing (SPDS) Project: A Pilot Study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Natalie Pafitis
Executive Editor
Editorial team: BMC Public Health

Dear Natalie,

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER FOR PUBLICATION IN BMC Public Health: Addressing the deficiencies in the evidence-base for primary practice in regional Australia - Sentinel Practices Data Sourcing (SPDS) Project: A Pilot Study

I am pleased to submit an original research paper for consideration in BMC Public Health. The paper proposes a novel way to monitor chronic disease prevalence on a population level through data collected routinely during patient interactions in General Practice. To date, information gathered from primary care interactions, using sentinel sites, has not been investigated as a potentially valuable surveillance system in Australia.

The study assessed the feasibility of accessing data obtained through a computerised clinical reporting tool that has been designed for desktop application (Pen Computer Systems (PCS) Clinical Audit Tool:™ PCS CAT). Collated patient data included information on chronic disease management and prevention, prevalence of health risks such as overweight and obesity, mental health indicators, medication profiling, as well as uptake of preventive health services (immunisation, cervical cancer screening and health checks). The study has shown that higher than national average estimates were found for the age-adjusted prevalence of chronic diseases such as hypertension, anxiety disorders and obesity/overweight.

This study has demonstrated that the scope of data collected by patient visits to their General Practitioners, facilitated through the Medicare-funded primary health care system in Australia, offers a feasible opportunity for surveillance of chronic disease prevalence and its associated risk factors. It hence illustrates the potential of using routine general practice data to inform evidence based primary practice in Australia.

In Australia, as in most other countries, general practitioners are the first source of referral within the larger health care system, and thereby provide an optimal opportunity for effective monitoring of morbidity data of the population. The findings of the paper propose a way to implement population-level surveillance. The paper fits within the scope of the BMC Public Health journal in that the findings are applicable to improved planning for health service delivery at a local level.

Proposed reviewers for this paper include:
1. Dr Richard Birtwhistle, Department of Family Medicine, Queen's University, 220 Bagot St., Kingston, ON K7L 5E9 Canada (E-mail: birtwhis@queensu.ca).
2. Dr E. Muggah, C.T. Lamont Primary Health Care Research Centre, Élisabeth Bruyère Research Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. (Email: emuggah@bruyere.org)
3. Dr Clive Aspin, Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney, New South Wales. (Email: clive.aspin@sydney.edu.au)
4. Dr L. Holden, School of Population Health, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. (Email: l.holden@uq.edu.au)

**History of Changes:**

- E-mail correspondence received from Journal Editorial Office, BioMed Central on 1st May 2013 as follows: -

Research involving human subjects (including human material or human data) that is reported in the manuscript must have been performed with the approval of an appropriate ethics committee. Research carried out on humans must be in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration (http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/index.html). A statement to this effect must appear in the Methods section of the manuscript, including the name of the body which gave approval, with a reference number where appropriate.

**Response:** The following statement has been added to the Methods section: -

The study was performed with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Health and Medical) of the University of Wollongong (HE 12/447).

I look forward to further correspondence regarding this article.

Yours sincerely

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