Reviewer’s report

Title: Can near real-time monitoring of Emergency Department diagnoses facilitate early response to sporadic meningococcal infection? - prospective and retrospective evaluations

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Reviewer: Pawel Stefanoff

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The manuscript "Can near real-time monitoring of Emergency Department diagnoses facilitate early response to sporadic meningococcal infection? - prospective and retrospective evaluations" provides interesting insight into the possibility of using syndromic surveillance into earlier detection of public health threats, considering invasive meningococcal disease as an example. The results indicate that monitoring ED diagnoses is not improving timeliness of public health response, and its sensitivity and positive predictive value is too low to be considered as an alternative to the routine notifications system. The methods used to demonstrate the performance of the alternative systems are sound, and justify the conclusions made. Overall, the article is well written, concise, and worth publishing as providing important evidence useful for public health practice.

I would suggest few minor (discretionary) corrections to improve clarity of the manuscript:

1. p. 4. I would rather not use the terms "isolated incidence", nor "dearth of literature", which can be difficult to understand for non-English readers.

2. p. 5. It would be useful to explain who implemented ED surveillance. Was it a national or regional institute of public health, bureau of statistics, or a university? It could be better explained how the system worked, for example which unit was collecting the ED reports, calling the regional PHUs?

3. I suggest to move all the details of the system from the background to the methods section, to avoid duplication of the system description.

4. p. 10, first phrase of the retrospective evaluation: "in 2004" used twice in the same phrase.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests