Reviewer’s report

Title: Decline in in-patient treatments of genital warts among young Australians following the national HPV vaccination program

Version: 2 Date: 11 September 2012

Reviewer: Julia Brotherton

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for asking me to review your paper. This work is a useful additional piece of evidence to document the decline in genital warts in Australia following the national HPV vaccination program. The ecological trends observed are consistent with the observed trends in both women and men in presentations with genital warts to clinics.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The major limitation of this study is that the study is only confined to private hospitals. It is unclear what proportion of warts are surgically treated in private hospitals and whether this proportion has changed over time. In Australia most people use private hospital treatment only if they have private health insurance, as they otherwise face very large out of pocket costs. The validity of this paper’s findings are therefore contingent on the stability of the proportion of the population with insurance coverage over time. Trends in private health insurance coverage in the population by age and sex over time should be reviewed and included in the discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions

2. The way the limitations are discussed in the discussion section also tends to underemphasise what may be important limitations. It is not immediately apparent to me that looking only at private treatments for warts has no bias compared to all hospital treatments for warts. It is likely that those with private health insurance are more affluent and this may be correlated with HPV vaccine uptake – any evidence about this issue should be presented.

3. I also think that evidence should be provided to support the statement that those with the most severe and refractory warts, which are the group who will need hospital treatment, are not likely to have recurrences post such treatment.

4. Similarly an important issue, accepting that topical treatments have been available throughout the period, is whether the cost of topical treatments or their availability has changed over time i.e. cost come down and availability increased as this could explain some of the fall in hospitalisations.

5. The abstract should specify that the analysis only includes private hospitalisations so the rates are not true national rates of hospital treatment.

6. The x and y axes need labels for the figures eg Year and Number of private
hospital treatments

Discretionary Revisions
7. It would also be appropriate to discuss what data sources are available to describe trends in public hospital separations with genital warts and whether this could add additional data to that presented in the current paper.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
Investigator on an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant on which CSL is a partner organisation