Author's response to reviews

Title: Using automated medical records for rapid identification of illness syndromes: the example of lower respiratory infection

Authors:

Ross Lazarus (ross.lazarus@channing.harvard.edu)
Kenneth P Kleinman (ken_kleinman@harvardpilgrim.org)
Inna Dashevsky (inna_dashevsky@harvardpilgrim.org)
Alfred DeMaria Jr. (alfred.demaria@slid.dph.state.ma.us)
Richard Platt (richard.platt@channing.harvard.edu)

Version: 6 Date: 19 Oct 2001

We have revised the manuscript to address all of the reviewer's comments. In brief, the revisions are as follows:

We note that we are unaware of published reports describing the use of automated medical records for surveillance. The deWit and Armstrong papers mentioned in the discussion are examples of sentinel surveillance systems that require clinicians to collect additional information specifically for surveillance purposes.

We know of no other citation for the ESSENCE project beyond the one noted in reference 4.

The discussion of the limitations of ICD9 codes has been expanded and the article by Goldstein has been cited.

The fact that data could be available almost instantaneously is noted, and we explicate further the logistical reasons for collecting it once a day, to avoid burdening clinical systems.

The important role of emergency rooms for surveillance has been made explicit.

The potential value of assessing changing patterns of repeat encounters is noted.

We have clarified the text to indicate that although cough accounted for the majority of encounters detected, the absolute number, including those encounters was tractable.

We have clarified that we intended "fever" to be assessed directly through recorded vital signs in the medical record.