Reviewer’s report

Title: Sentinel surveillance system for early outbreak detection in Madagascar

Version: 1 Date: 4 November 2009

Reviewer: Charmaine Gauci

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Paper is of publishable standard with some amendments based on comments below:

Background

1. Include a brief description of the infectious disease reporting system in Madagascar, this would be useful for the reader to understand the usual practice for notification of infectious diseases and be able to understand the added benefit sentinel surveillance has in this country.
2. Give a brief description of diagnostic practices in Madagascar and access to diagnosis in sentinel practices.
3. 1st and 2nd sentences of 2nd paragraph of background should go to methods section.

Methods

1. Describe the geographic distribution of the 13th sentinel practices. Where the practices chosen to be at random geographically?
2. Case definition. Please clarify if Fever was the first criterion in definition and 4 illnesses were then defined i.e. malaria, ILI, arbovirus, diarrhoeal illness since this is not clear.
3. Was the notification made on named patient basis or anonymous. Please clarify. If on name patient basis, could links with labs be made?

Results

1. Would have liked to see more descriptive results on the four different diseases monitored including age and gender and geographic distribution for each illness apart from frequency.
2. Frequency distribution by seasonality would have been of interest for each disease.
3. 2nd paragraph of results should be in methods.

Discussion

1. Would appreciate to have seen a discussion on representation of these sentinel practices in terms of
1. No of GP’s from total GP’s in country
2. Geographic representation
3. Population covered

2. Can comparison be made to outbreaks detected by sentinel system to the national surveillance system # showing the added benefit this system has.
3. Comment on use of sentinel surveillance for trend analysis over time.

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:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'