Reviewer's report

Title: GET WELL: an automated surveillance system for gaining new epidemiological knowledge

Version: 2 Date: 21 February 2011

Reviewer: Philip M Polgreen

Reviewer's report:

This interesting paper builds on work using internet search frequency by demonstrating the utility of investigating the search trends at a commonly-used health-specific website in Sweden (Get Well). The strength of this paper is its practical and local application of a relatively new approach for disease surveillance.

The authors also use the appropriate time series methods for analyzing autocorrelated data and include a non-seasonal medical condition to remove the trend in total web use.

Major Compulsory Revisions -- none

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The authors report findings descriptively in Figures 4,5,6, but these figures/captions do not report the results of any statistical analysis. Was this intentional?

2. Can the authors include in the discussion section an idea of how this approach might work in other countries where there may be multiple competing health web sites vs. one dominant site?

3. Should public health departments start looking more closely at the trends from their own website logs (e.g., sites for specific diseases or conditions on their web sites)? Can the authors comment?

4. A weakness of the paper is its length. Given the content presented, the paper could be shortened. Specifically, the methods and results sections could be shortened without distracting from the paper’s findings.

5. What language(s) were used for the Google Insight analysis portion of the paper? Only Swedish?

Discretionary Revisions

On page 16 what do the authors mean by “less vulnerable” can they elaborate? Do they mean less dependent?
Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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.