Reviewer's report

Title: Human influenza A H5N1 in Indonesia health care service-associated delays in treatment initiation

Version: 1 Date: 15 January 2013

Reviewer: Paolo Mulatti

Reviewer's report:

The topic is of interest and well suited for the Journal. Overall the introduction and discussion sections are decently written; however the Methods and Results sections would need to be reshaped, to allow a better understanding of what has been done.

Below my specific comments.

A) MAJOR REVISIONS

Methods:

1) I strongly suggest to reorganize the Method and Statistical Analysis section, as data used are not clearly defined methods are not well explained. Moreover, some of the information provided here are repeated throughout the section.

Statistical Analysis:

2) If I understand correctly, you analyzed the differences in the various time intervals grouped by single factors (i.e. Presence of a single symptoms, or location of first presentation to provider). I do not think that this is the best way to analyze your data, as you would lose the effect of the presence of multiple factors. I would rather suggest to use an alternative method, such as a GLM. In such a way you would be able to consider all of the factors, and to include interactions between terms.

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B) MINOR REVISIONS

Background:

1) Overall the background is well written and understandable, although it is a bit too brief and do not highlight the gaps of knowledge that lead to the study, and why the expected results are of interest. This part should be located just before the declaration of the purpose of the study.

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2) Line 10: In the paragraph “We recently reported ... after symptoms onset”, what do you means with “case fatality rates are still improven”? Do the fatality rates increase or decrease when the treatment is delayed?
Methods
3) You should declare the amount of data you retrieved from the Ministry of Health and from literature.

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4) It is not clear whether you recorded all of the symptoms for each case or only the predominant one

5) What do you mean with “outcome information”? Should this provide information on the fatality rate?

Results:
6) Please clarify in this section and/or in the Methods the actual numbers you are working on, and why you are excluding some of the cases from the analyses.
   i.e. you obtained data for 124 cases of which 114 had information on the symptoms onset date and time to presentation, 94 had data on the time period to viral testing... etc...

Moreover, how many of the virologically tested cases had also date of symptoms onset? And what about the treated?

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7) lines 9 and following: The numbers differ from the ones reported in table 2. In table 2 you report that 65 out of 118 cases (and not 65%) first presented to a local physician office, same for the 25/124 to the emergency room. Moreover you should specify that the total number of cases you are considering here is 118 and not 124 (and please explain why).

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8) Are the 30 symptoms reported on presentation the predominant symptoms (i.e. only one predominant symptom was recorded)? If more than one symptoms were recorded per case, I suppose that the time intervals to virological tests and to treatment did not depend on just the predominant symptom, but on a combination of symptoms. I think the authors should consider this possibility in the discussion.

Discussion
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9) lines 9-10: In your opinion why the fatality rates were lower for cases presenting to rural health centres and public health services?

10) Line 10: Please replace “figure 2” with “table 2”.

11) Line 20: I do not understand why you are saying that 65.52% of the cases presented to a physician’s office. In table 2, you report 65 cases on 118 being presented to a physician (i.e. 55%).
Tables:
12) Table 2. Why did you report 107/124 and not 107/118, since your population of reference here is 118 (sum of N) and not 124…

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C) DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

Background:
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1) Line 4: “By 21 February 2012, 586 cases have been reported..”, if possible state the whole period of reference (e.g. “From XXXX to YYYYY…”)

Methods
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2) lines 6 and following: “All cases had laboratory confirmation of infection… …Health”, you have already explained that in the preceding phrase.

3) lines 9-10: I would rather write “likely source of exposure” than simply “esposure”.

4) lines 16-17: These two lines could be merged with the description of the data included in the registry you created (lines 9-10), to avoid repetitions and ease the reading

Statistical Analysis:
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5) lines 2-3: I would delete the phrase “All analyses reflect data as reported”, and begin directly with “Cases with missing data.”

6) It is not clear what you consider here as “time intervals of interest”. I think it would be better to define what “time intervals” are earlier in the Method paragraph, right after you describe the data sources.

Tables:
7) Table 3. Please report in the main text the totals you have put in the table.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests