Author's response to reviews

Title: Establishing a Nationwide Emergency Department-based Syndromic Surveillance System for Better Public Health Responses in Taiwan

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dr. Deborah Saltman  
Manager Editor  
BMC Public Health  

Dear Dr. Deborah Saltman,

We are pleased to submit this manuscript entitled “Establishing a Nationwide Emergency Department-Based Syndromic Surveillance System for Better Public Health Responses in Taiwan” for your consideration to be published in BMC Public Health. Attached are the requested materials: (1) the manuscript, and (2) the figures.

As we know, the past three decades have documented increases worldwide in severe outbreaks of emerging/re-emerging infectious diseases with unknown etiological agents. Moreover, global travel and commerce provide ever-increasing opportunities for infectious diseases to cross national borders. Much has been published on the use of information technology to establish syndromic surveillance systems to detect emerging outbreaks and other public health threats. Our paper, however, describes the first such system to be established in a non-English-speaking Asian country. This paper traces the process, from planning to implementation, of building a nationwide syndromic surveillance system in Taiwan and addresses major practical concerns and barriers encountered. We would be very glad to share our valuable experience with readers interested in this public health issue of global concern.

Thus far, the Asian countries most affected by frequent outbreaks of H5N1 have included Mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. The high volume of travel between these countries and Taiwan raises the concern that a human-to-human pandemic, should it occur, may spread rapidly to Taiwan and cause considerable loss of life. As surveillance is the most effective prevention and control measure against avian influenza recommended by the World Health Organization, our goal has been to institutionalize a means of monitoring various syndrome groups and disease patterns (including respiratory, gastrointestinal, etc.) for trends and indicators. This information makes it possible for us to detect potential outbreaks early and provide valuable opportunities for preparation and preemption.

We believe this manuscript is closely aligned with your journal’s commitment to all aspects of epidemiology and public health. The national syndromic surveillance system we have designed is a brand new public health approach in Asia. Our experience would be very useful to other researchers working to establish similar systems in their country before the arrival of pandemic influenza.

Your consideration and kind assistance are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely Yours,

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