Reviewer's report

Title: Comparing Estimates of Influenza-Associated Hospitalization and Death among Adults with Congestive Heart Failure Based on how Influenza Season is Defined

Version: 4 Date: 4 January 2008

Reviewer: Marie R Griffin

Reviewer's report:

The numbers of hospitalizations/deaths are the better comparator than the rates -- the rates look deceptively close but they yield very different numbers b/c they are for very different lengths of time. This could be easily fixed by annualizing the rates and then comparing them. This would also give a more easily interpretable rate of the excess number of events for a population each flu season.

Published estimates of flu hospitalizations in the elderly range from 1 to 10 per 1000 population. Rates are lower in younger age groups, but persons with high risk conditions have rates similar to the elderly. Estimates from this study assuming a population of 5448 are high ranging from 9 to 24 per 1000. Deaths estimates are also high 1 to 20 per 1000.

The authors' conclusion is that researchers should use more than one method -- that doesn't make sense. Researchers should use the method that gives the most accurate estimate. All the estimates appear high. To me, the lowest estimate is the most believable in this dataset, but some form of validation would be required to determine if this is the most accurate.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'