Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of Patient Characteristics on the Risk of Influenza/ILI-Related Complications

Authors:

Debra E Irwin (debra.irwin@ingenixPS.com)
Lisa B Weatherby (lweatherby@epidemiology.com)
Wen-Yi Huang (huangw@mail.nih.gov)
Daniel M Rosenberg (dr74409@glaxowellcome.co.uk)
Suzanne F Cook (sfc3705@glaxowellcome.com)
Alexander M Walker (AlecWalker@Epidemiology.com)

Version: 2 Date: 18 Jul 2001

Reviewer: Dr Douglas Fleming

Level of interest: not specified

Advice on publication: Other (see below)

I found this a useful paper. It is a piece of operational research into health care delivery in the setting of a health care maintenance plan. The objective of the study was achieved and the practical implications of their findings are important. Four points are relevant and the last three of these call for additional comment.

1. The authors correctly point out that comparatively few persons aged 65 and over were included and this is a serious limitation.
2. There is an inherent assumption that all influenza related disease is labelled influenza-like illness. From experience of surveillance in the UK it is evident that conditions such as acute bronchitis and acute otitis media are also increased during influenza outbreak periods inferring that influenza is the probable cause. The authors have not examined diagnoses other than those coded as influenza (ICD 9 code 487).

3. The time period for this examination was the beginning of October to the end of the following April. It would be useful to show the distribution of cases (preferably by week) and for any comments on that distribution especially in the light of available virological data even if not from the same population. They refer to such virological data on page 16 but provide no indication as to the timing of virus circulation.

4. It is not possible to generalise from one epidemic experience to others.
I have acted as a consultant to GlaxoWellcome in a clinical trial programme of zanamivir. I am currently providing consultancy services to Wyeth in connection with their influenza vaccination programme. I have also provided ad hoc services to other companies on influenza related matters. I hold no shares in the pharmaceutical industry and have no competing interests with regard to the publication of this paper or otherwise.

**Competing interests:**

None declared.