Reviewer's report

Title: Will the community nurse continue to function during H1N1 influenza pandemic: population-base survey in Hong Kong: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 21 December 2009

Reviewer: Wayne Triner

Reviewer's report:

Review of
Will the community nurse continue to function during
H1N1 influenza pandemic: population-base survey in
Hong Kong: a cross-sectional study

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. It is an important contribution to the understanding of workforce issues during challenging time. The authors had the opportunity to study the attitudes and factors contributing to those attitudes in “real-time” as the H1N1 outbreak was occurring.

Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
It is well-defined in the abstract. However, one typically expects to find the study question to be highly visible near the end of the Background section. It is often worded in such a way as to allow the reader to guess the primary independent and outcome variables.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Generally, yes. I see a few places where language may be an issue. Since this paper reports on only the issues related to community nurses feelings about participation during the outbreak, I am left wondering what other issues were addressed in the survey. This places the editors in the uncomfortable position of questioning whether “data-splitting” is occurring. This can easily be resolved by a single sentence that lists the other topics covered in the survey.

Are the data sound?
Again, the response rate is not addressed. Does this indicate a selection bias?

Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
See below. Additionally, the use of “marginally significant” is intellectually dangerous. Many investigators prefer to report the p-value or confidence intervals they found and then comment on issues such as confounders and sample size in a discussion of limitations.

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by
Generally, yes. There is no consideration of study limitations by the authors. Additionally, since the reported willingness to provide care during the H1N1 outbreak was so high, were there observed difficulties in the provision of home care during the period studied? I suspect the number of nurses who did not show up for work was much less than the number who reported that they would not show up. While an interesting question for another paper, it is conspicuously absent from this discussion.

Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
No.

Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes.

Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Perhaps one could improve this element. This is not a population-based survey. This is a workplace survey of community health workers.

Is the writing acceptable?
There are several grammatical errors, mostly related to tense and prepositions. Some of the sentences are awkward and could benefit from a copy editor. There are several ideas that are important, but the authors tend to use run-on sentences, thus obscuring their meaning. In general, it is better to use two or three sentences to convey a multi-tiered idea than one long sentence.

1. page2 Major Response rate should be reported and commented upon.

2. page2 Major The sentence beginning Their unwillingness… is a little confusing. I would suggest re-wording it for clarity.

3. page 11 Major When presenting the difference between mean VAS scores, it is more useful to report the means for each comparison group and the calculated p value (such as “willing Xmm, unwilling Ymm, p < 0.01”). Alternatively, the difference of means can be reported with the calculated p value. This is done in table 3, but lacks meaning as presented on page 11.

4. Table 1 Major Many numbers do not reconcile with the total of 267. It may be useful to account for missing by including a “missing or refused to answer” category.

5. page 10 and table 2 Major How did the authors handle the variables of age and experience being a nurse? Were they dichotomized?

6. page 8 Major The 100 mm scales sound like Visual Analog Scales. These are actually not Likert scales. I think this may be a typographical error.
Just an insignificant point is; VAS are commonly accepted for all types of subjective measurements, but only validated for changes in pain magnitude.

7. page 4 Minor Is ESCAPED the correct word?
8. page 5 Minor I suspect the authors are referring to PRE-EXISTING chronic disease… If not, this finding would need some clarification.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. I hope my comments help to improve the quality of this work.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne Triner, DO, MPH, FACEP
Albany Medical College
Albany, NY, USA

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests'