Reviewer's report

Title: How does the New Cooperative Medical Scheme influence health service utilization? A study in two provinces in rural China

Version: 1 Date: 25 December 2009

Reviewer: Yiing-Jenq Chou

Reviewer's report:

1. Literature review is inadequate: The author stated that there is an increasing body of Chinese literature that evaluate the effect of NCMS on health care utilization (p.6), but did not discuss any of them. The author then stated that there is “only one” study that examines the impact of NCMS on health service utilization. This is confusing.

2. The research used “self-reported prevalence of any chronic disease for the last 12 months” to calculate utilization rate of health services. Is this a “yes or no” answer? How could a person with one chronic disease being compared to another person with 10 chronic diseases? Not only the number of diseases, shouldn’t disease type also affect utilization? This measure definitely is too rough to produce meaningful results.

3. According to the paper, provinces were chosen based on average income level: Shandong is richer then Ningxia. However shouldn’t health care accessibility (the provider side) be different due to the different level of development? In addition, there should be a lot of state unobservables that affect people’s utilization. The true impact of NCMS can not be determined using the current statistical methods.

4. The paper used logistic regression to analyze the utilization rate of health care. This is inappropriate: why should utilization been dichotomized into “used” and “never used”? Shouldn’t the level of utilization be more meaningful?

5. The paper stated “high drug prices were another reason why people did not use more outpatient services under NCMS” (p.14). Yet the analysis did not include anything concerning the drug prices. Are they different among the regions? How much of the results can be attributed to this?

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

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