Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Yiing-Jenq Chou

Reviewer's report:

1. If no “impact” of the scheme can be assessed, what exactly is the contribution of this paper?

2. Both the other reviewer and I have pointed out the problem of unobserved factors, but the author simply stated that this cannot be controlled for. It should be pointed out that this is a vital limitation and the value of the findings depends on it. I did not mean that the author should try to measure every possible confounders and put them in the regression. Research that investigates the impact of a policy normally does not do that anyway. However, what is normally done is at least use some statistical methods to control for it (two-state least square, DID, panel data analysis etc). In addition, I think the counfounders that were missed in this paper were not even “unobserved” (people’s attitude may be unobserved, but number of hospitals or physicians in the area should not be).

3. Why is the Poisson distribution used? How could be the outcome variable occur at random in this situation?

4. Concerning the type of chronic disease that I mentioned in the previous review, I did not mean that the author should analyze “by disease category”. This would be meaningless. What I was trying to point out is that using self-reported number of diseases is inappropriate. Unfortunately this problem remained unsolved in the revised version.

5. Overall, I think the idea of the paper is good, in the sense that the “impact” of CMS is important. However, the “association” of CMS and health care utilization is not. Unfortunately this is what this manuscrip analysed.

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: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.