Reviewer's report

Title: Urban - rural disparities in antenatal care utilization: a study of two cohorts of pregnant women in Vietnam

Version: 1 Date: 21 February 2011

Reviewer: Larry Slutsker

Reviewer's report:

Comments to authors. This is a reasonable discussion of HDSS findings on antenatal care (ANC) in terms of access and quality in two HDSS sites in Vietnam.

Please address the following comments as minor essential revisions:

1) It would be useful to provide the context of what is recommended for ANC according to WHO and in Vietnam early in the paper, both in terms of numbers of visits and services to be provided. This will allow the reader to better understand what is being under-provided and what is being over-provided.

2) The representativeness of the two HDSS sites, as noted by the authors, potentially problematic. They have noted this, but perhaps it could be more clearly stated. In addition, the methods, prospective assessment of access and services received, may be more accurate than retrospective cross sectional methods, but also might not be directly comparable to these usual survey methods. The authors mention this but then still seem to draw firm conclusions from the prospective data to infer improvements compared with older cross sectional data.

3) The paper would benefit with a better description of the sites within the HDSSs in terms of where women can receive ANC, and how hard it is to get there. One would suspect urban settings have much better and easier access, but this is not clearly described in the paper. One of the benefits of HDSS sites is the ability to describe access and utilization in the context of geospatial relationships – this is conspicuously absent. Even a simple “average distance to travel to receive ANC would be helpful.

4) The authors seem to have avoided using any statistical testing throughout the paper. I am unsure if this is intentional or not. Descriptive adjectives are used (larger/smaller) but without apparent statistical testing (though admittedly many of the important differences would clearly be significant). Though the data derive from HDSS sites they do not represent the entire population of all pregnant women so I do think statistical testing would be correct to use.

5) A comparison of ‘quality of service” by type of facility would be very useful and would help to target and tailor specific interventions. The authors collected these data but do not present them.
6) I am not sure what the ANC expenditure data tell us without a better understanding of what types of facilities are charging and what types are not.

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

**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.