Reviewer's report

Title: Under-utilization of health care services for infectious diseases syndromes in rural Azerbaijan: A cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 20 September 2010

Reviewer: Matthew A Davis

Reviewer's report:

Comments to Authors:

I enjoyed reviewing this manuscript and found it to be well written and the topic interesting. This study is a cross-sectional survey of Azerbaijan residents that inquired about recent illness and use of health services. Although not specifically tested, a lot of the paper gets at the topic of inadequate access to healthcare.

For the convenience of the authors I have separated my remarks into two categories: issues that should be addressed and other suggestions the authors may feel free to accept or disregard.

Issues that should be addressed (minor essential revisions):

(1) I did not see anywhere in the manuscript what the response rate was to the survey. The authors mention that there were 796 respondents but how many adults did they approach? This would give the reader a better indication if self-selection bias was an issue.

(2) The authors refer to the study subjects as either respondents or volunteers. I believe respondent is the most appropriate term and should be used consistently throughout the paper.

(3) One of the two objectives of the paper is to estimate the prevalence of infectious disease syndromes. The prevalence among study subjects is reported but how might this translate to the entire country? Given the nationally-representative design of the sample is it possible to make some national estimates with SEs? If not, perhaps the authors could just discuss briefly what the national prevalence (cases) might be to give the reader a more complete picture and fully obtain the objective.

Other suggestions:

(1) From reading the ms I didn’t get a very good feel for the survey questions. I would suggest adding a paragraph that describes the instrument. Was it piloted or validated in anyway? What was the recall time period (I believe it mentions 5 years in the results but it is not mentioned in the methods section where I would expect to find it.

(2) It was a little confusing have two aims. From my understanding, the first aim (to estimate prevalence) was covered in table 2 and the second (health services use) in Table 3. Isn’t the most interesting part about health services use among
people with the symptoms that should require they see a physician? For instance what is the reported use of health services among those with ILI or GI conditions? I suppose this would have to get down to an episode-level which perhaps is beyond the scope of this paper.

(3) From a reader’s perspective I felt like the title gave away the findings. I think it is the “Under-utilization” part. Also, is the title truly descriptive? It implies that the study looked at health services use for (or among those with) infectious disease syndromes when the estimates were just prevalence of symptoms in general and health services use in general.

Thank you for allowing me to review this paper. I believe with some minor revision it will be a nice contribution to the journal.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.