Reviewer’s report

Title: Costs of medicines and health care: a concern for Australian women across the ages

Version: 1 Date: 15 July 2013

Reviewer: Christine Walker

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Minor essential revisions

I found this an interesting and informative piece of research which contributes to a growing area of costs research in Australia. In this sense I would rate it as an article of importance to those who have an interest in this field. It is important to note that this field is growing and having influence on health policy research and health financing in developed countries.

The question is well-defined and encapsulates the way health is financed in Australia. This has relevance to the health financing in other developed countries as the authors indicate in their references to Health Affairs publications.

This is a qualitative study of free text comments and I would strongly recommend that the methods be more explicit in this article. Readers of medical and health related journals do not always understand qualitative research and its contribution to our understanding. This often leads to criticism that could be avoided. As it stands the authors say in the methods section say ‘Following methods used in previous studies’ and I consider this inadequate.

Generally I think the data are sound though I think it is a great pity there are no income levels to show the proportion of medicines costs to people’s incomes. If this information was not available it should appear in the limitations section. Similarly if it was available and used in a quantitative study that study should be referenced.

I consider the Discussion section could be strengthened. On p 15 there is a statement that ‘data show that the decreasing number of bulk-billing practices and out of pocket costs have had a detrimental impact’. This could be cross referenced to other studies showing similar findings. At the same time I believe that at present bulk-billing has actually increased so some reference to the date this statement refers to would be a help here.

There is then a reference to ‘Groups that might be at particular risk…’ This requires referencing to support the supposition as does the sentence that follows it. On page 16 there is a statement that health care costs were a problem despite universal health insurance and government subsidies designed to mitigate the costs. I think these government policies could be briefly described here to assist an international audience who won’t be familiar with Australian system. Additionally there could be references to other articles that have researched this.
There is also a need to reference ‘the working poor’ on page 17 and explain this in the Australian context. Further on page 17 there is a statement about the user pays’ principle which could be explained in its Australian context to an international audience. The statement that ‘there can be unintended consequences should also be developed. The statement that families have stress and anxiety should also be developed and referenced as there was little evidence that this was a strong finding in this piece of work.

Finally I thought the results showed some interesting data on bulk-billing and that this area could be developed in the Discussion section. It was evident in the results that bulk-billing was valued by some and not by others. Bulk-billing might also need to be better described to international readers.

I think the writing is clear, the authors acknowledge their continuing work on the longitudinal study, and the title and abstract are accurate.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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 with regard to this paper.