Author's response to reviews

Title: Using U.S. Medicare Records to Evaluate the Indirect Health Effects on Spouses: a Case Study in Alzheimer's Disease Patients

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Version: 2 Date: 1 October 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
October 1, 2013

BMC Health Services Research
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Dear BMC HSR:

Please accept for consideration the revised methods report we have submitted, “Using Medicare Records to Evaluate the Health Effects of Spousal Caregiving for Alzheimer’s Disease.” The report describes the productive use of Medicare claims data to explore the health status of spouses whose partners have Alzheimer’s disease. Our approach involves inferring marital and clinical status from administrative records. It represents a clear advance for this hotly debated methodologic approach, whose importance has grown along with the size of available health claims databases and the means to analyze them.

Below is a discussion of several issues for which you requested revisions in your e-mail of September 27:

Competing Interests: Your e-mail requested that we add a section describing possible competing interests after the Conclusions section. The original version that we submitted contained a section that was mistakenly titled “Conflicts of Interest.” We have elaborated on that section and appropriately retitled it “Competing Interests.” After studying several examples in published BMC HSR articles, we believe that this rewritten and retitled section satisfies the requirements that outlined in your e-mail as well as in the instructions posted on the web.

Acknowledgements: As you requested, we incorporated the separate “Funding” statement in the original manuscript into the Acknowledgements section of the revised version.

Ethics Statement: You also request that we provide some support for our statement that we performed the study under a Data Use Agreement (DUA) with the U.S. Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS). CMS sets the same, standard terms for its DUA whenever it supplies beneficiary records to researchers. We are posting as a separate file the official certification that we have permission from CMS to use its 5% Medicare sample for the study described in the manuscript.

We believe that we have satisfied your requests for revisions. We would be happy to answer any further concerns that you might have.

Sincerely,

Daniel Gilden, President
JEN Associates