Reviewer's report

Title: "It's easier in pharmacy": why some patients prefer to pay for flu jabs rather than use the National Health Service

Version: 2 Date: 17 September 2013

Reviewer: Hannah Christensen

Reviewer's report:

Summary
This manuscript reports the results of a service evaluation of flu immunisation carried out in Boots pharmacies for the 2012-13 flu season. Data were obtained on individuals (89,011) paying privately for flu vaccination from 479/586 Boots pharmacies offering the service. Some Boots pharmacies (258/586) are commissioned to deliver NHS flu vaccinations in addition to a private service. Of those pharmacies offering a private only service (328), 13 were chosen and additional data collected from a sample of individuals receiving a flu vaccine in these pharmacies to determine reasons for paying for vaccination. The authors found 6% of 89,011 individuals across 479 pharmacies were eligible to get the vaccination free on the NHS. In the 13 pharmacies where additional data were collected, 921 patients completed a survey and 199 (22%) were eligible to get the vaccination free on the NHS. Common reasons given by the 921 individuals for paying for vaccination included the convenient location and opening hours of the pharmacy.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1) The question posed by the authors (what the prevalence is of individuals eligible for free flu vaccinations choosing to pay privately at Boots pharmacies and reasons for this) is well defined but slightly lost in the rather long background section. Sections of the background would be better placed in the methods (parts of background paras 5-7) and discussion (background para 4) and I feel the background would benefit from more references supporting: need for increasing vaccine uptake; published vaccination targets; the statement ‘There is moderate to good evidence from several countries that community pharmacies can safely provide a range of vaccinations’; the statement ‘The uptake of NHS-commissioned flu vaccinations in community pharmacies in England has increased significantly in recent years, due in part to published data on the success of locally-driven services.’

2) At present it is difficult to understand from the methods section exactly how the evaluation was conducted, and the extent of any bias in the data as a result of the sampling methods used, please describe more fully:

a) How the 13 pharmacies where additional data were collected, were selected. How was a ‘representative mix of city centre and edge of town pharmacies’ ensured? In these 13 pharmacies were all patients approached for additional
information or just a sample, if a sample how were these individuals selected?
b) In the methods provide all relevant dates for the study; the methods section
mentions survey data from 24th September and 7th December 2012, but
eligibility data are mentioned in the results up to 16th March 2013.
3) The results section is a little repetitious e.g. data were collected from 479
pharmacies stated 3 times - I think it would help the reader to consolidate these
sections.
4) Results para 6: it would be helpful to include as an appendix a copy of the
survey that was given to participants in the 13 pharmacies so the results can be
viewed in the context of how the questions were posed.
5) Results para 6 states 50/199 people were aged 65+ therefore were eligible for
free vaccination, table 2 indicates 48 people?
6) Tables: Please add row totals to all tables – looking at the numbers it is clear
some respondents gave more than one answer. Please also expand table titles
so they stand alone e.g. include description of sample being considered for each
table. For the ‘other’ category in the footnotes it would be helpful to see the
number of times (in brackets) each ‘other’ reason was given.
7) Please expand the discussion to more fully state and discuss: the limitations of
the current work due to gaining reasons for paying privately from only 30% of
those doing so in a limited number (13) of pharmacies; current work in the
context of previous studies (see above). I don't think you can necessarily
extrapolate the data found in this study to other pharmacy multiples (particularly
as it’s a small sample of people for some analyses/descriptions and the
choice/location/representativeness of pharmacies is not currently clear) so would
suggest removal of the statement ‘if data from other pharmacies were explored
similar results are likely to be found’.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) Results para 4 2nd sentence: I think the clarity of this could be improved by
the insertion of ‘Of these’ at the start of the sentence (as the 53% relates to a
denominator of 5323).
2) Table 3: should the ‘Proportion of total (n=100)’ actually read ‘Proportion of
total (n=199)’?

Discretionary Revisions

1) Results para 6: it is interesting (and concerning if true) that only 50% of the
eligible people in this study had been contacted by their GP regarding flu
vaccination. Is this likely to be recall bias or are 50% of people genuinely not
being contacted? It would be helpful if the authors could discuss this.
2) I think it would be helpful to the reader if an additional figure/flow diagram were
included illustrating the different flows of patients/data in this study because it is
currently a little difficult to follow.

Minor issues not for publication
1) Postcode in address of corresponding author requires correction.
2) Inconsistent spelling of immunisation (i.e. immunisation/immunization, sometimes capitalised mid-sentence), please correct.
3) I tend to refer to data in the plural e.g. data were rather than data was
4) Background, para 2: remove capitalisation of Doctor
5) Results para 3: remove close bracket in first sentence
6) Results para 4: chose not choose
7) Results para 4 last sentence: data should not be capitalised
8) Results para 2: 16th March instead of 16 March, for consistency with other date presentation
9) ‘from’ not ‘form’ in competing interest statement

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

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.