Reviewer's report

Title: Disparities in preventive care: comparison of self-report and Medicare claims data

Version: 1 Date: 20 June 2006

Reviewer: Siran M Koroukian

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General

This is a study of great relevance to the fields of public health and health services research. Discrepancies between self-reported rates of preventive service use and that obtained from Medicare claims data are wide, making it difficult to obtain the true prevalence of preventive service use in the population.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Several major concerns:

1. The authors do not provide a rationale for their study objective to examine racial/ethnic disparities of preventive procedures using both self-report and Medicare claims; or a conceptual basis for their hypothesis. As a result, the second paragraph in the Background comes as a surprise to the reader. This section needs to be revised, including a review of the relevant literature in somewhat of a more elaborate fashion; the identification of the gaps in knowledge; the contribution of the present study to the literature; as well as a conceptual basis for the study objective and the hypothesis.

2. The extent to which the measures derived truly reflect preventive/screening services is not clear. The authors state "Because of challenges in distinguishing screening procedures from diagnostic procedures, both screening and diagnostic codes were included" (first paragraph under Receipt of Preventive Services, page 5). The methodological challenges are indeed well-documented in the literature; however numerous studies have attempted to make this distinction, including studies that they have cited (e.g., Cooper and Koroukian). When no distinction can be made between screening and diagnostic procedures, then one wonders how the authors justify keeping the focus in this study on preventive/screening services. The authors either need to incorporate more elaborate algorithms attempting to make such distinctions, or drop the term preventive from the study altogether.

3. The claims-based rates presented in figure 1 seem to be very high for some procedures. For example, the authors report a claims-based rate of colorectal cancer screening of 42.5% among Whites and 37.5% among Minorities. Based on other published studies, one would expect to see one third of the reported rates (see, for example, Ko C et al., and a report by the General Accounting Office). This raises the question of whether claims were unduplicated across different claims files (Outpatient Standard Analytic File and Physician Supplier file) at the individual level by date of service. One also wonders if Medicare beneficiaries participating in the MCBS database would be more sensitized to the use of preventive services by taking part in the survey hence the higher rates observed in this study. And if that is indeed the case, then the question is whether these results can be generalized to the Medicare population at large. The authors need to compare and contrast their findings with that of comparable studies, and the results of this exercise need to be included in the Discussion section of the manuscript.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Justify the cutpoint for $25,000 in categorizing annual income

2. Under limitations, the authors raise the issue of limited statistical power in some of the analyses (page 12). While this is apparent in the tables, the authors should list the analyses in which power may have been compromised, and further, include cautionary notes relative to some of the findings.
3- Did Medicare reimbursement for colonoscopy begin in 1998 or 2001? Please confirm.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests