Reviewer's report

Title: Utilization Patterns of Chinese medicine and Western medicine under the National Health Insurance Program in Taiwan, a population-based study from 1997 to 2003

Version: 1 Date: 20 August 2007

Reviewer: George Lewith

Reviewer's report:

General
There is less of a research question here than a report on a database. The research question in a sense is, “What are the patterns of utilisation for Chinese medicine as opposed to Western medicine over a six year period in a very large sample in Taiwan? How do these patterns relate to age, sex, area of deprivation and disease being treated?”

This is useful and interesting as it may well reflect what is happening in other Asian countries, and certainly gives us some insight into patterns of use. As such, it is a very unsophisticated dataset which is presented in an open way for others to use and refer to. Such datasets are very difficult to obtain within a Western medical environment and indeed would probably inform us about very different issues.

The methods used are appropriate and well described, although I would very much like there to be a statistical opinion in relation to the general estimating equations it seems that the data has been presented in a very thoughtful and logical way. There is no requirement to control the data. In general the English through this paper is of good quality, although one thing would be very helpful and that is to understand what NT$ means in US equivalence as most people not familiar with the local currency in Taiwan won’t understand this.

The discussion is a little bit long-winded and often without explanation. It is a report on a large dataset and I just wonder where the authors think this might lead? It would also be useful to understand a little more exactly what is meant by uniquely Taiwanese (Chinese) diagnoses and treatments such as “muscle strain therapy”. I think what the researchers are pointing out is that two systems can work in harmony as an integrated approach. What obviously one would like to know is whether it’s cheaper or more expensive to treat chronic illness with Chinese or Western medicine, whether life expectancy is different and what are the reports of adverse reactions? This is a big sample and it could actually tell us a great deal about the safety, health economics and overall population outcome and I wonder whether information on this is planned in future papers and future reports? It would be good to know.

The manuscript does adhere to the relevant standards and the title and abstract
are appropriate, the writing is acceptable.

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

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.