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: 30 October 2007

Reviewer: Nicholas Horton

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors describe changes in the utilization of Chinese medicine and western medicine in Taiwan over the period 1997 to 2003 using health services data. This is a modestly important analysis that has the potential to shed light on use of Chinese medicine.

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

(1) No discussion of IRB approval was included. Some statement as to oversight to ensure the protection of human subjects is needed.

(2) No information on how the random sample of 200,432 NHI beneficiaries was selected in provided. More importantly, the drop to 136,720 with valid and complete information is troubling. What selection process led to the exclusion of the other 63,000 subjects? Why were the partially observed subjects not included in the analysis? How did the demographics differ for the partially observed and fully observed subjects?

(3) What form of the working correlation matrix was used for the analyses? Was an empirical variance used? More details are needed in the methods section.

(4) Aspects of the introduction were choppy, and hard to follow. Some restructuring would be helpful.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

(1) On page 4, it is stated that 9 to 65% of the population use CAM. This range is implausibly large.

(2) On page 8 and 12, “framers” should be “farmers”.


(3) On page 8, “confidential” should be “confidential”.
(4) Rounding to the nearest 10th of a percent is likely sufficient (many values are given to the nearest 100th of a percent).
(5) Would a graphical presentation of table 5 be more comprehensible?

**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 limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests