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: 2 Date: 21 February 2008

Reviewer: Nicholas Horton

Reviewer’s report:

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 useful analysis that has the potential to shed light on use of Chinese medicine.

Discretionary revisions:

(1) The authors have clarified details of their choice of working correlation structure, which is an autoregressive form. Table A1 in the response to reviewers includes the estimated correlations from this matrix, but the unstructured working correlation matrix is not displayed. These correlations might well be of some substantial interest, and if so, might suggest using an unstructured correlation rather than the AR for the analyses in the manuscript, and including the unstructured working correlation matrix as a Table.

(2) It would be preferable to report highly significant p-values as \( p<0.0001 \) rather than the technically incorrect \( p=0.000 \).

(3) The authors report on analyses of 68% of the original sample. While they report on the proportions missing due to causes such as death or age exclusions, some acknowledgement of selection bias as a limitation is important to add to the Discussion.

(4) Figure 2 has a very low data/ink ratio (see Tufte’s Visual Display of Quantitative Information). Perhaps a table might be preferable to the current presentation.

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, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.