Author’s response to reviews

Title: Outpatient Primary and Tertiary Healthcare Utilisation among Public Rental Housing Residents in Singapore

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Author’s response to reviews:

4 Mar 2019

Prof Maria Elisabeth Johanna Zalm
Editor-in-Chief
BMC Health Services Research

Dear Prof Maria Elisabeth Johanna Zalm,

Re: Manuscript – BMC Health Services Research BHSR-D-18-01895 Outpatient Primary and Tertiary Healthcare Utilisation Among Public Rental Housing Residents

On the behalf of my co-authors, we would like to thank you and the reviewers for the effort and time spent on improving our manuscript. We have reviewed the comments carefully and have revised the manuscript accordingly. Our point by point responses to the comments are as follows.

Reviewer reports:

Amresh Hanchate, Ph.D. (Reviewer 1): The authors have been responsive to the issues raised in the previous review, and the revisions are appropriate. There are only some minor / editorial revisions I would like to suggest.
1) I feel the term "higher utilisation" is more appropriate than "increased utilisation" since the analysis is one of comparison of cross-sectional levels of utilisation and not of their temporal change. This term is used in several places, including in the Conclusion of the Abstract.

Authors’ reply

We would like to thank Prof Amresh for the suggestion. We agree with the recommendation made and have made the amendment as suggested in the manuscript and abstract.

2) In Figure 1 you state that out of 870k eligible patients in the System, you excluded 610k since they did not reside in the System. You have provided a valid explanation that this results from the System catchment area being unique in that it includes many tertiary and specialty hospitals that are unavailable in other regions of Singapore. You also mention that the converse trend - of residents of the System seeking care outside of System - is likely to be infrequent. I think it will be important to mention all this information in the Discussion section, possibly in the limitation section.

Authors’ reply

We would like to thank Prof Amresh for the suggestion.

We have added the following paragraph in the limitation section of the discussion (underlined)

“Secondly, data pertaining to residents utilizing healthcare facilities in other regional health systems and non-users of the SRHS was unavailable, which may affect the representativeness of the reported population. However, it is expected that the proportion of residents utilizing facilities in other health systems to be small due to the geographical ease of access to the primary care facilities and specialist centres available in the SHRS. Importantly, SHRS comprises of 4 general hospitals, 5 specialty centres and 3 community hospitals which offer a comprehensive array of primary and specialist services which may not be available in other regional health systems. In this study, a significant proportion of patients were excluded as they resided in a non-SHRS area. While complete data pertaining to their healthcare utilization is unavailable as they fall under the purview of other regional health systems, future studies should consider examining healthcare utilization among these patients to evaluate if there are inter-regional health system differences in healthcare utilization.”

Thank you and we look forward to your favorable review.

Yours sincerely,

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