Reviewer’s report

Title: Government and charity funding of cancer research: public preferences and choices

Version: 6 Date: 3 June 2015

Reviewer: sarah smith

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The (presentation of the) statistical analysis is considerably improved. I still think that there are concerns about the plausibility of the findings based on hypothetical scenarios:

• I am confused about the authors’ findings on ordering effects. The previous version said there were ordering effects, in this version there are apparently none. To confirm no ordering effects, the authors should show that the estimated effects of the treatments (from the random effects model) are the same irrespective of the ordering. At the moment, the test is unclear. At one point, they appear just to add a single binary indicator for the alternative ordering.

• The hypothecation scenario is unrealistic since the choice is only for medical research charities. Arguably, the framing of the scenario may encourage respondents to compensate charities for other cuts in public funding by narrowly focusing on one set of charities. It also doesn’t capture the effect of public funding pressures (discussed in the introduction) in a realistic way: The government is unlikely to consider tax hypothecation – which is costly – at the same time as public funding cuts. The conclusion on how much charities would benefit from the combination of public funding cuts and tax hypothecation is therefore implausible and should be removed.

• I think the strongest conclusion from the research is that individual donation decisions are largely unrelated to public funding – partly because of the importance of very personal motives linked to experiences of cancer. This seems a more robust and generalizable finding than the results on the effects of (an unrealistic form of) tax hypothecation.

The paper is quite long and could do with being shorter and more focused.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.