It’s a Matter of Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: The perspective or viewpoint of a pharmacoeconomic analysis governs the type of costs considered. Consensus is that the societal perspective is preferred; this allows for the full economic consequences of adopting healthcare interventions to be considered. It is important that authors accurately report the study perspective.

Objective: We hypothesized that papers published in economic journals (e.g. Pharmacoeconomics) were more likely to correctly report the study perspective than other titles.

Methods: We searched the Wolters Kluwer Health Clinical Trials Insight Database for health economic evaluations that were fully published between 2002 and 2007. Data extracted included publication year, primary author affiliation, journal title, perspective taken, costs included, and whether there was drug company sponsorship.

Results: 1700 evaluations were retrieved. 284 stated they were from the societal perspective. On analysis, only 67% included the appropriate costs. 33% of papers erroneously stated they were from a societal perspective.

Of those papers that correctly stated the perspective, 22% were published in economic journals, 26% of authors had a primary economic affiliation and 39% had drug company involvement versus 9% (p<0.01), 17% (p=0.07) and 26% (p=0.06), respectively, for papers incorrectly stating the perspective.

Objective: We hypothesized that papers published in economic journals (e.g. Pharmacoeconomics, Health Economics, Value in Health) were more likely to correctly report the study perspective than papers published in more general titles. This is based on the premise that economic titles are more likely to have expertise in-house to detect such errors and/or are more likely to send papers out to reviewers who have expertise in economic evaluation.

Methods: Health economics evaluations published between 2002 and 2007 were identified from the Wolters Kluwer Health Clinical Trials Insight Database (a comprehensive database of articles published in over 1300 medical journals).

RESULTS

1700 evaluations were retrieved, of which 284 stated they were from the societal perspective. The frequency of published reports was highest in 2004, with a decline thereafter (Figure 1). Only 67% of papers that stated the analysis was from a societal perspective included the appropriate costs. There was no discernable trend with respect to publication year (see Table 1).

CONCLUSIONS

Many published reports of economic evaluations incorrectly report the study perspective. This is of particular concern as decision makers may make erroneous decisions when using these data to allocate scarce resources.

Greater reliance on accurate reporting of data can be placed on those analyses published in economic titles. These titles are more likely to have recourse to the appropriate expertise to ensure correct reporting of data.

It would be interesting to further analyse these preliminary data and see whether other commonly used perspectives are also incorrectly reported.

REFERENCES