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Is the flu vaccine of any use and wasting public money?

Overall, it appears that influenza vaccinations escape the scrutiny that other medicines receive. For example, an eurosurveillance article concludes "the lower 95% CI was 3% and the upper CI was 65%, indicating a large range of uncertainty, but concluded as "we can say with confidence that the influenza vaccine has been effective so far this season" ¹

A confidence interval that includes nearly zero (3%) indicates that there is little confidence. So how can the authors conclude in the same sentence that they can be confident that the influenza vaccine has been effective?

Furthermore, what does the influenza vaccine prevent? What is the end point? From an overdiagnosis point of view, "been effective in preventing laboratory-confirmed primary care consultations this season" is not relevant in the real world, as all patients were attending the GP.

On top of that, the flu vaccine could have made the vaccinated person more vulnerable to other viruses. ²

Apart from scrutinizing the end point and possible adverse effect of increasing vulnerability to other viruses, are the NNTs acceptable from an overdiagnosis perspective?

Are the hundreds of millions of pounds per year per country well spent?

Is it acceptable that with reference to the flu vaccine, overdiagnosis rules: "medication adherence" and "disease mongering" and paying primary care doctors and pharmacists to get targets vaccinated?

Margaret McCartney wrote in the BMJ in 2014 "What use is mass flu vaccination?" It is time to seriously consider that question. ³

1 Pebody R, Warburton F, Ellis J, Andrews N, Potts A, Cottrell S, Johnston J, Reynolds A, Gunson R, Thompson C, Galiano M, Robertson C, Mullett D, Gallagher N, Sinnathamby M, Yonova I, Moore C, McMenamin J, de Lusignan S, Zambon M. Effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine in preventing laboratory-confirmed influenza in primary care in the United Kingdom: 2015/16 mid-season results. *Euro Surveill.* 2016;21(13):pii=30179. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2016.21.13.30179>

2 Cowling BJ, Fang VJ, Nishiura H, Chan KH, Ng S, Ip DK, Chiu SS, Leung GM, Peiris JM. Increased risk of noninfluenza respiratory virus infections associated with receipt of inactivated influenza vaccine. *Clinical Infectious Diseases.* 2012 Jun 15;54(12):1778-83

3 McCartney M: What use is mass flu vaccination? *BMJ* 2014; 349
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