2004 flu vaccine shortage analyzed

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A U.S. epidemiologist says the flu vaccine shortage of 2004 appears to have had a negative impact on continuity of care.

Dr. Charles Schade and colleagues at the West Virginia Medical Institute analyzed Medicare claims for flu vaccinations in West Virginia and found the applications dropped by more than 50 percent from approximately 92,000 in 2003 to approximately 44,000 during 2004.

The researchers found the vaccine shortage severely affected the ability of physicians to provide influenza vaccination to their patients and, therefore, some patients received vaccines from sources other than their regular doctors, most often from a mass immunizer, or did not receive vaccine at all.

The percentage of Medicare recipients who received flu vaccine from the same clinician as the year before fell from 54 percent in 2002-03 to 3 percent during 2003-04.

Schade and colleagues suggest the disruption of continuity of care is concerning because continuity in the ambulatory care setting has important benefits, including improved health and reduced healthcare costs.

The study appears in the Annals of Family Medicine.

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