

## LETTERS

## NEWS STORY ON TAMIFLU STUDY

## Principal author of PRIDE study responds to news story in *The BMJ* claiming that the study was based on “flawed” analysis

Jonathan S Nguyen-Van-Tam *clinical professor of health protection, and senior author, PRIDE Consortium*

University of Nottingham, Clinical Sciences Building, City Hospital, Nottingham NG5 1PB, UK

On 19 March 2014, researchers from the PRIDE (Post-pandemic Review of anti-Influenza Drug Effectiveness) Consortium published the first outputs from a project investigating the effectiveness of neuraminidase inhibitors against outcomes of public health importance during the 2009 flu pandemic in the *Lancet Respiratory Medicine*.<sup>1 2</sup> The headline results suggested that neuraminidase inhibitors were associated with statistically significant reductions in mortality: overall adjusted odds ratio 0.81 (95% CI 0.70 to 0.93; P=0.0024) versus no treatment and 0.50 (0.37 to 0.67; P<0.0001) if treatment was started within two days of symptom onset.

Within 48 hours, *The BMJ* published an article written by a staff journalist, which claimed that the new study “was based on flawed analysis.”<sup>3</sup> Zosia Kmietowicz had contacted Mark Jones, University of Queensland, who is working with the Cochrane Collaboration on another project related to neuraminidase inhibitors. In turn, Jones had provided a detailed statistical critique of the PRIDE study, which formed the centrepiece of Kmietowicz’s article. The PRIDE Consortium was not forewarned about the article and, more importantly, not offered any a priori right of reply, as would normally be the case during post-publication correspondence. Faced with such a one sided critique of its work, the PRIDE Consortium had no option but to post its initial rebuttal in *The BMJ*.<sup>4</sup> There has since been a further critique from Jones and a further statistical rebuttal from the PRIDE Consortium.<sup>5 6</sup>

Thus, the correspondence and debate relating to a major publication in a Lancet Group paper has been played out in the pages of *The BMJ*, fronted by an entirely one sided article from a staff journalist on *The BMJ*. The major question here seems

to be the propriety of *The BMJ* and Dr Jones in going beyond the reasonable response to a press release, by asking potential opponents for a detailed statistical critique without offering the authors of the study any right to reply alongside. A more conventional and considerably more ethical approach would have been to submit correspondence post-publication to the *Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, which could then have considered the response in the normal way, including offering the PRIDE Consortium a realistic period of time to consider the critique and write a rejoinder.

Competing interests: I am senior author of the paper that was critiqued.

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- 2 Muthuri SG, Venkatesan S, Myles PR, Leonardi-Bee J, Al Khuwaitir TSA, Al Mamun A, et al. Effectiveness of neuraminidase inhibitors in reducing mortality in patients admitted to hospital with influenza A H1N1pdm09 virus infection: a meta-analysis of individual participant data. *Lancet Respir Med* 2014; published online 19 Mar.
- 3 Kmietowicz Z. Study claiming Tamiflu saved lives was based on “flawed” analysis. *BMJ* 2014;348:g2228. (19 March.)
- 4 Myles PR, Leonardi-Bee J; PRIDE research consortium investigators. Re: Authors’ response to Dr Jones’s critique of the study by Muthuri et al (2014) [electronic response to Kmietowicz Z. Study claiming Tamiflu saved lives was based on “flawed” analysis]. *BMJ* 2014. [www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/691879](http://www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/691879).
- 5 Jones M. Reply to Pujja R Myles and Jo Leonardi-Bee [electronic response to Kmietowicz Z. Study claiming Tamiflu saved lives was based on “flawed” analysis]. *BMJ* 2014. [www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/692120](http://www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/692120).
- 6 Myles PR, Leonardi-Bee J; PRIDE research consortium investigators. Further clarifications from authors of the Muthuri et al (2014) paper in response to Dr Jones’s second critique [electronic response to Kmietowicz Z. Study claiming Tamiflu saved lives was based on “flawed” analysis]. *BMJ* 2014. [www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/692897](http://www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g2228/rr/692897).

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