

From: James Scanlan <jps@jpscanlan.com>

To: Ralph@bu.edu, davidharrington@g.harvard.edu,
dhunter@hsph.harvard.edu, ware@hsph.harvard.edu

Cc:

Date: Monday, July 21, 2014 12:17 pm

Subject: NEJM Statistical Issues

Dear Professors D'Agostino, Harrington, Hunter, and Ware:

Below is a recent article that is pertinent to issues I have previously raised in emails to you of [March 4, 2008](#), [May 7, 2009](#), or [June 9, 2010](#) regarding your roles as statistical consultants for the New England Journal of Medicine.

“Race and Mortality Revisited,” Society (July/Aug. 2014)

http://jpscanlan.com/images/Race_and_Mortality_Revisited.pdf

Those issues involve patterns by which standard measures of differences between outcome rates tend to be systematically affected by the prevalence of an outcome and the implications of those patterns with respect to the utility of those measures for quantifying the strength of an association. A point the article makes several times is that few observers analyzing group differences in outcome rates are aware that it is possible for the relative difference in a favorable outcome and the relative difference in the corresponding adverse outcome to change in opposite as the prevalence of an outcome changes much less that they do so systematically (a point equally pertinent to analyses of subgroup effects). Thus, it would be useful to consider whether the peer reviewers of the New England Journal of Medicine typically know such things and, if not, whether they should be educated on such things.

In addition, pages 16 to 18 of the recent article discuss some issues regarding research methods at Harvard Medical School and Harvard School of Public Health, issues previously addressed at Harvard in references 1 and 2 (which matters I previously brought to your attention by email of October 11, 2012). I hope you find the recent article interest and consider the points it makes with respect to your roles in providing guidance to the New England Journal of Medicine and your other activities regarding the measurement of differences between outcome rates.

Sincerely,

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1. Applied Statistics Workshop at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University, Oct. 17, 2012:

http://jpscanlan.com/images/Harvard_Applied_Statistic_Workshop.ppt

2. Letter to Harvard University Regarding, inter alia, Measurement of Health and Healthcare Disparities at Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School (Oct. 9, 2012):

http://jpscanlan.com/images/Harvard_University_Measurement_Letter.pdf

Attachments: