Project title: Exploring the impact of SMS reminders and education on influenza vaccine uptake amongst medically at risk children.

Background / rationale: The burden of influenza in children is substantial, with frequent primary care consultations in both preschool and school age children as well as a high hospitalisation rate in young children. A safe vaccine is available, recommended and free for Australian children at risk. However, uptake of the influenza vaccine remains suboptimal: less than 20% of Australian high risk children are vaccinated. Sub-optimal vaccine coverage rates can, in part, be attributed to vaccine hesitancy arising from doubts or fears about immunisation. Of concern, is the finding that public confidence in vaccines is decreasing and anti-vaccine movements are becoming stronger. Interventions are needed to improve vaccine coverage. The use of SMS reminders has been effectively used with some medical illness and with promoting parents to bring their children in for routine vaccination. However, the influenza vaccine is unique. Therefore, we believe that to improve uptake, it is not sufficient to just provide a reminder about the vaccine but you also need to provide tailored education tools to the parent regarding influenza vaccination. However, we need to move away from relying on the traditional approaches to education and promotion. We are proposing that a web based decision aid will be an enhanced approach to delivering balanced information. The impact of education (in the form of a decision aid) plus text message reminders on influenza vaccine uptake amongst at-risk children has not been formally investigated.

Aim: To evaluate the implementation of the SMS plus education strategy in the hospital settings.

Objective: We will undertake a pilot study with a small cohort of parents (n=100) who will be randomised to either receive the intervention or be in the control group. Parents will be followed up over the course of the influenza season to see if their child receives the influenza vaccine. We will explore their receptiveness to the intervention and any barriers to being involved with the research. We will also explore the system factors that need to be considered from the hospital if this intervention is going to be introduced.

Methods: Students will be involved with all aspects of this study including recruitment (at the Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick), data collection and analysis. The study will involve both quantitative and qualitative data collection and will capture information from parents, hospital staff and management.

Anticipated outcomes / significance (point form): Develop a research report with recommendations for future research and a manuscript for publication.

Timeframe: If you are interested in undertaking this ILP in 2018, please contact Holly Seale, h.seale@unsw.edu.au