

Correspondence

Identifying seasonal variation in allergic rhinoconjunctivitis

To the Editor:

Studies of allergic rhinoconjunctivitis epidemiology using routine data on hospital admissions and primary care consultations are limited by the facts that not all patients seek help from health care professionals and that sales of over-the-counter hay fever medications are difficult to quantify.

The excellent article by Singh et al¹ provides important data on the seasonal variation of allergic rhinoconjunctivitis symptoms. Seasonal variation of symptoms relates to fluctuations in aeroallergen concentrations, which themselves differ from region to region. Therefore these results, which were obtained by means of a thorough analysis of health survey data, will be less applicable outside the United States.

The inadvertent mass collaboration of patients using internet search engines to research their symptoms has allowed early identification of outbreaks of influenza, another seasonal disorder.² By using a search for the term “hay fever” in the Google trends application (Google, Mountain View, Calif) limited to the United States and the months of January 2008 through December 2010,³ a consistent annual pattern of online search engine activity can be seen (Fig 1), which is in agreement with the seasonal data of Singh et al (shown in Fig 5 of their article).¹ The agreement between these 2 graphs appears to validate the Google method, an alternative and cost-effective way of identifying peaks of allergic rhinoconjunctivitis symptoms, particularly in countries in which large-scale standardized health surveys are not performed.

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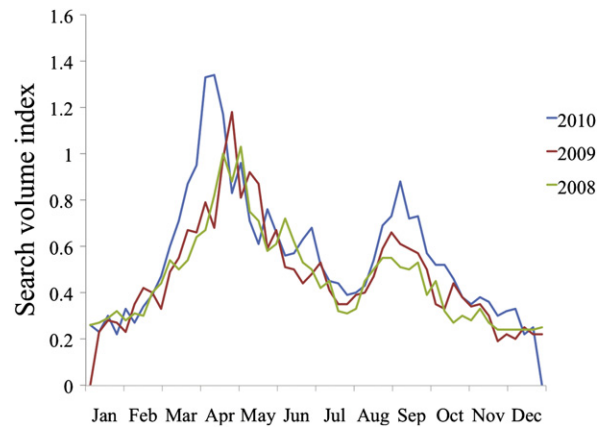


FIG 1. Online search engine activity for “hay fever” from 2008 to 2010 in the United States using the Google search engine. The scale on the y-axis compares the search activity with the average search activity at a fixed point in time (January 2004).

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Editor's note: There is no accompanying reply to this correspondence.

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