

Consumer Health Information from Cochrane Reviews

An update on synopses

What are synopses?

Several years ago, the Cochrane Consumer Network began developing a consumer health information system, based on Cochrane reviews. At the heart of this is the 'synopsis': a short, plain language summary of a Cochrane review and its subject.

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Underpinning the *Cochrane Collaboration Reviewers' Handbook* guidelines for these summaries are several key requirements. They should aim to:

- Be short, accurate, and easy to read
- Encompass the basic requirements for informed consumer decision making in health (explanation of the intervention, alternatives, positive and adverse effects)
- Inform people of the evidence only, and not offer advice or tell people what to do

The synopsis has a short 'headline' encapsulating the findings of the review (up to 25 words), and then a fuller piece of text based on the content guidelines (up to 100 words). Full consumer health information from Cochrane reviews needs to be a local (or specialised) endeavour.

How are these summaries produced?

There are two aspects of quality in this process: one is whether the summary is accurate, and the second is conforming to the guidelines on content and readability. Synopses are a formal part of Cochrane reviews, and so are subject to the normal editorial and quality processes of Cochrane Collaborative Review Groups.

In addition, the Consumer Network provides a drafting and editing service, ensuring that the summaries meet the guidelines. We have a guaranteed short turn-around time for providing review groups with a summary of a draft review. Only those summaries that meet these guidelines will be re-published by the Consumer Network.

Analysis by several assessors has shown that most summaries drafted without involvement of the Consumer Network do not adequately meet the guidelines [1]. The Network will offer edited suggestions to review groups for all summaries which are rejected.

Continued page 2...

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Meredith Cameron, from the Network, is producing more guidance to help people drafting their own synopses, and will be offering more training workshops at Cochrane Collaboration Colloquia as well.

There are now several people working part-time on this consumer health information system, with funding available for several years (our thanks to Medibank Private, Australia). By the middle of 2001, the Consumer Network will have provided review groups with a draft (or edited) consumer summary for all Cochrane reviews.

Where no summary approved by the Review Group is available, the Consumer Network produces an interim 'headline' (authorship differentiated from the abstract).

Because of recent experience, we will soon revise the guidelines. We will also ask consumers to evaluate the summaries. Your thoughts on any of these issues are welcome.

As of issue 2, 2001 of The Cochrane Library about 30% of Cochrane reviews had high quality consumer summaries

What about languages other than English?

The high quality approved summaries are already being translated (mostly by Cochrane centres) into several languages, including Chinese,

Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Plans are also being made for translation into several other languages. The Cochrane Collaboration has guidelines for translators - contact Update Software to learn more about becoming an approved translator (E-mail: info@update.co.uk). The Consumer Network would like to be able to keep consumers informed of all the available translations, so please get in touch with us if you are translating consumer summaries - or if you want to help.

How can you get them?

The summaries are currently used by the Consumer Network in two ways: as the basis for the 'What's New' digest for each new issue of *The Cochrane Library*, and on the

mailing lists. Paper versions, however, are a major cost issue. Anyone able to offer this type of support is welcome to get in touch.

Doing something with all this research!

If you can promote the web site, the 'What's New' digest, or arrange links from other web sites to the Cochrane Consumer web site, that would help publicise the findings of Cochrane reviews. Letting journalists know about the web site, and the media services there, would also be a great help.

Whatever anyone's thoughts about Cochrane reviews, one thing is certain: they are not being used to anywhere near their potential. The synopses, and the consumer and media information

system being built around them, offer a unique, potentially powerful, and, we believe, very valuable opportunity to start changing that. Evidence should be available to everyone who needs to use it. This is an attempt to start trying to embody that ideal into reality. ■

Hilda Bastian

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REFERENCE

1. Bastian H, Cameron M, Silagy CA, Alderson P. Ensuring the quality of consumer synopses of Cochrane reviews. Abstract of a poster: 8th Cochrane Colloquium, Cape Town, October 2000.



Cochrane Consumer web site (<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com>). You can sign up for free e-mail updates at the Cochrane Consumer web site.

As well as plain text searching, the consumer web site has a plain consumer language browsing system. It leads to all the 'headlines', which in turn lead to the full summary (where an approved version is available) and the full abstract.

Some Cochrane entities are printing paper copies to distribute through their



From the Chair



The Cochrane Collaboration will celebrate its eighth birthday this year and, during this short life, it has grown from a small group of 'evangelists' to an international collaboration of several thousand people. The Collaboration has reached another milestone; we recently broke through the **one thousand reviews** barrier in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (Cochrane Library, Issue 2, 2001). This tremendous achievement is due to the hard work of thousands of enthusiasts around the world and I think it deserves recognition – thank you all!

Cochrane News

Cochrane News is published by The Canadian Cochrane Centre and is edited by Diane Gauthier and Laurie Cocking. The Co-Editors are guided by an Advisory Committee consisting of:

Chair, Steering Group – Peter Langhorne, UK
Administrator, Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat – Jini Hetherington, UK
Centre Representatives – Meredith Cameron, Australia and Mingming Zhang, China
Consumer Representative – David Potter, UK
Coordinating Editor Representative – Chris Williams, UK
Field/Network Representative – William "Mac" Beckner, USA
Methods Group Representative – TBA
Review Group Coordinator Representative – Thilo Kober, Germany
Trials Search Coordinator Representative – Heather Maxwell, UK
Canadian Cochrane Network and Centre (CCN/C) Director – Arne Ohlsson, Canada
CCN/C Co-Director – Kathie Clark, Canada

Cochrane News is the international newsletter of The Cochrane Collaboration (UK Registered Charity No. 1045921 registered in England No. 3044323). It is distributed by Cochrane Centres worldwide. The views expressed are those of the authors, and are not necessarily shared by the Cochrane Collaboration, the Co-Editors, or the Advisory Committee.

For information about Cochrane News please contact the Co-Editors - Tel: +1 905 525 9140 extension 22738; Fax: +1 905 546 0401; E-mail: cochrane@mcmaster.ca ■

Cochrane News is distributed internationally via Cochrane Centres. If you are having problems receiving Cochrane News or you would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact your Cochrane Centre (see page 16 for contact details). ■

Cochrane reviews have already earned a reputation for being of high quality. In general, these plaudits are well-deserved but we cannot afford to be complacent. For this reason the Steering Group has recently advertised for a Quality Improvement Manager (see page 13). The person appointed to this new central post will have a particular responsibility for ensuring the Collaboration produces high-quality reviews in the most efficient and effective ways possible. His/her first task will be to map out what processes are currently in place and identify priorities for future improvements.

One of the truly distinctive features of Cochrane reviews is the commitment to keeping them up-to-date. However, everyone involved in the reviewing process now knows that this is a major challenge which can be very time-consuming. In recognition of this the Steering Group had previously agreed to the general expectation that reviews should be updated on a two-yearly basis (rather than the previous annual update). Bearing in mind that providing the contact reviewer with

complimentary copies of the Cochrane Library is a way of saying 'thank you' for keeping their review up-to-date, we needed to make some changes to manage this process in an efficient and equitable manner. The new policy will ensure that the contact reviewer automatically receives 10 complimentary issues of the Cochrane Library from the time of first publication or subsequent update of their review. The millennium seemed a good time to start so all contact reviewers will automatically receive complimentary copies until Issue 1, 2002 when their review will need to have been updated in the previous two years to qualify automatically. We recognise there may be special circumstances which delay updating and contingency plans are in place to ensure that the Collaborative Review Groups have some copies to use at their discretion. So, please get out there and get updating. Oh dear, that reminds me... its time for my update. ■

Peter Langhorne

*Chair, Cochrane Collaboration
Steering Group*

Deadline for Submissions

The deadline for submission of articles for issue 22 of Cochrane News is August 6, 2001. Please e-mail articles for consideration to cochrane@mcmaster.ca



A new brick in the wall: The Consumer Co-ordinator of the Cochrane Haematological Malignancies Group (CHMG)

The Haematological Malignancies Group (CHMG) established a Consumer Co-ordinator position which was reported in Issue 20 of Cochrane News. Our aim is to build up a CHMG-consumer network to involve consumers in the review process and to provide a platform for discussing consumer-related issues. Our focus will be to include consumers both nationally and internationally.

Why a consumer coordinator?

We think that the involvement of consumers in Cochrane activities is quite challenging. In Germany, as well as in other non-English-speaking countries, we are faced with particular language barriers which add to the other well-known difficulties of involving consumers in the review process. In addition, we realize that consumer involvement in medicine and Cochrane activities are especially unknown in Germany. Therefore, we are promoting the idea of Cochrane Collaborative Review Groups including consumer involvement and establishing a reliable basis for the anticipated consumer involvement. We think a bundling of the activities in the hand of one person might be useful to fulfil these tasks.

The CHMG will endeavour to increase its international consumer contribution. This will be achieved once the group has gained a larger profile. During the first editors' meeting in February 2001 it was decided that each editor would identify suitable consumers in their local area.

Our group is already cooperating with the Endocrine and Metabolic

Disorders Group also based in Germany as well as with cancer self-help groups. A close liaison with the patients' advocate of the German Leukemia and Lymphoma Aid (Deutsche Leukämie- und Lymphom-Hilfe, Bonn) is vital, to facilitate both the promotion of the Cochrane activities and the approach to potential consumers.

At present, we are concentrating on the evaluation of existing literature on this subject to learn about the experience gained in English-speaking countries. If there are other people in the Collaboration who have taken a similar position, please contact us for an exchange of ideas. In this regard it is of particular interest for us to get in touch with CRGs in non-English speaking countries. Of course any further suggestions would be welcome, too.

Sabine Kluge

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Dutch Introduction to Evidence-Based Medicine

The Dutch Cochrane Centre celebrated the publication of the first Dutch textbook about evidence-based medicine (EBM) last Christmas. Following a successful series on systematic reviews in the main Dutch medical journal, the staff of the Dutch Cochrane Centre were asked to write a practical introduction to EBM. The textbook was well received and adds to the current EBM activities of the Centre. Some of these activities include: courses on evidence-based guideline setting for the Dutch Society of Medical Specialists, clinics in literature searching for funding agencies and a well-visited annual course on EBM at the base of the Centre, the Academic Medical Centre in Amsterdam.

Besides the fun of teaching and writing, like most national centres, the Dutch Cochrane Centre had to develop these initiatives to secure funding for core centre activities. In addition, these extra EBM-activities have had a positive spin-off in terms of increasing the number of professionals who want to get involved in The Cochrane Collaboration. ■

Pim Assendelft

Co-Director, Dutch Cochrane Centre

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Photo (left to right): Rob Scholten, Charles Dumas (publisher), Martin Offringa, and Pim Assendelft give a toast to the new EBM book.



9th International Cochrane Colloquium 9-13 October 2001, Palais des Congres, Lyon - France

Important Dates

Notification of abstract acceptance	31 May 2001	Accommodation registration deadline	1 September 2001
Early registration deadline	15 June 2001	Cancellation refund deadline	14 September 2001
Full registration deadline	30 August 2001	Late registration deadline	1 October 2001
Meeting request deadline	1 September 2001	On-site registration	9-13 October 2001

Target Audience

- Current contributors to the Cochrane Collaboration and potential contributors who have an interest in learning more about the Collaboration's activities, and in participating in training workshops
- Potential partner organisations and institutions
- Health care providers and consumers interested in the application of reviews to health policies as well as patient care

Scientific Secretariat

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69002 – Lyon, France
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Cochrane Collaboration Discretionary Fund

Criteria for guiding Steering Group decisions on 'ad-hoc' discretionary spending

The Steering Group has decided to allocate money to set up a small discretionary fund (initially limited to a total expenditure of £10,000 per year, with a limit of £2,000 to any one applicant). Collaboration entities will be eligible to apply for small amounts of funds to facilitate important activities within the Collaboration. The following criteria will guide such decisions:

1. **Focus on 'core' functions** - The proposal should: (a) focus on core functions of Collaboration activity particularly the production, maintenance and dissemination of high quality reviews, and (b) be made by a Cochrane entity.
2. **Gain to the Collaboration** - The proposal should promise significant gain to all or part of the Collaboration.
3. **Collective benefit** - The potential benefit of the proposal should not focus on a single entity but apply across a number of entities (for example, by co-ordinating activities).
4. **Likelihood of success** - The proposal should have a high likelihood of meeting its aims within the agreed budget.
5. **Alternative sources of funding** - The proposal should not have an obvious and readily accessible alternative source of funding available.
6. **Cost of not funding** - There should be judged to be a significant loss of advantage to the Collaboration if the proposal is not funded.
7. **Long-term continuity** - Because discretionary funds will not be available on a repetitive basis, there should be some plan for continuity of funding and support if this will be necessary.

Applications

A brief application for funding should be sent to the Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat (secretariat@cochrane.co.uk) to forward to the Executive of the Steering Group. The Executive will take the final decision, requesting additional information from the applicant(s) as necessary. Patterns of application and expenditure will be reported to the Steering Group every six months. ■

Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group
May 2001

The Cochrane Library: Supporting the Facts Behind the Stories

National electronic Library for Health

The National electronic Library for Health (NeLH) is a digital library, designed to provide health care professionals and the public (through NHS Direct Online) with knowledge and know-how to support health care related decisions in the United Kingdom (UK). The pilot site is up and running (<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk>) and it is anticipated the NeLH will be fully established by March 2002, as part of the UK government Information Strategy for the National Health Service (NHS). The aim is to provide access to the best current knowledge on health care for the NHS, patients, care givers and the public. It is no surprise therefore to find a web link on the front page to The Cochrane Library, The Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness (DARE) and Effective Health Care Bulletins.

The Cochrane Library is available to NHS employees - free at the point of use -via the NeLH.

Hitting the Headlines

Health stories are news stories. Most days, newspapers carry reports about health care, including stories of the effectiveness of new diagnoses or treatments. Such stories can create expectations or anxieties in patients and pressure for health professionals. It is important therefore to know the facts behind the headlines.

'Hitting the Headlines' is a news service aiming to provide busy health professionals with a rapid and reliable analysis of the evidence behind selected news reports. Staff at the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (NHS CRD) have

been commissioned by the NeLH to locate and systematically examine the research behind the headlines.

Unbiased, brief and readable summaries appraising the research evidence are posted on the NeLH web site within 48 hours of publication. For the benefit of professionals who want more information, The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR) and DARE are searched for reviews on the topic in question and the references listed, as direct links wherever possible. For example, a story in the Daily Mail (20 February 2001) reported on research into glucosamine sulphate, a dietary supplement which top athletes and sports people have been using for years to combat osteoarthritis. This article was actually based on a well-conducted clinical trial and accurately reported the findings related to both pain reduction and cartilage preservation. In support of this paper a systematic review contained in the CDSR was cited and there were four structured abstracts from DARE.

The NeLH and NHS CRD believe that 'Hitting the Headlines' is useful to patients and professionals when deciding on the accuracy of a news report. It is another way of getting high quality information on effectiveness to the people who need it. ■

Alison Booth

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Registering the Cochrane Logo

The Cochrane logo has been registered as a trademark in Australia, Canada, the European Community and the USA. Registration of the logo protects it from misuse, because it is now a criminal offence for people outside the organisation to use it without permission. Members of registered entities in the Collaboration are (and have always been) entitled to use the Cochrane logo on their headed stationery, newsletters and other material; however, now that the logo is a registered trademark, it is advisable to indicate this when the logo is used internally. This can be done in a textual way, by inserting the sentence, "The Cochrane logo is a registered trademark in Australia, Canada, the European Community and the USA" as a footnote to any text bearing the logo. Alternatively, an upper case 'R' with a circle drawn around it (Word users can access this symbol by typing Control+Alt+R) should be added after the words 'The Cochrane Collaboration' (for example: The Cochrane Collaboration ®). This symbol should be used when any materials bearing the Cochrane logo are next revised.

IMPORTANT NOTE: It is the logo plus the name of the organisation that have been trademarked. If using the logo without the name, the symbol and statement about the logo being a registered trademark in those countries must not be added beneath it. ■

Jini Hetherington

*Administrator, Cochrane Collaboration
Secretariat
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COLLABORATION ®

*The Cochrane logo is a registered trademark
in Australia, Canada, the European
Community and the USA*

Steering Group Elections

In accordance with the Cochrane Collaboration's Articles of Association, the following people are due to step down from the Steering Group in October 2001:

- Gerd Antes** (Centre representative)
- Hilda Bastian** (Consumer Network representative)
- Mike Clarke** (Methods Group representative)
- Jimmy Volmink** (Centre representative)
- Chris Williams** (CRG representative)

Nominations are therefore sought for candidates to represent:

- Collaborative Review Groups (CRGs): Active members of CRGs (the definition of 'active' is determined by each editorial team) are eligible to nominate, stand and vote for this position. This is known as an 'at large' position (i.e. someone who will represent all members of CRGs rather than specific members, such as reviewers).
- The Consumer Network: Registered voting members of the Consumer Network are eligible to nominate, stand and vote for this position.
- Methods Groups: Active members of Methods Groups (the definition of 'active' is determined by each Group) are eligible to nominate, stand and vote for this position.
- Cochrane Centres: Members of Cochrane Centres are eligible to nominate, stand and vote for these two positions.

The other members of the Steering Group whose terms last another one to two years are listed at the bottom of this article. In addition to having representation of all entities in the Collaboration, over time we would like there to be balanced representation with respect to other

important considerations, including geographical location and gender.

Candidates in this election should bear the following in mind:

1. A candidate wishing to stand for election must be nominated in writing to the Secretariat Deputy Administrator by both a proposer and a seconder. When the list of nominated candidates is announced, in the order of receipt of nominations, the names of their proposers and seconders will also be made public.
2. Nominated candidates must notify the Secretariat Deputy Administrator in writing of acceptance of their nomination, together with a brief (no more than two hundred words) personal profile by 23:59 BST (GMT +1 hour) on Thursday 7 June 2001. This profile is to assist voters in casting their votes, and should state what the candidate has to offer if elected to the Steering Group. Profiles consisting of more than two hundred words will be arbitrarily truncated at that limit.
3. There is no limit to the number of candidates.
4. Candidates are elected for a period of three years.
5. Whilst serving on the Steering Group, members are eligible for financial assistance with travel and accommodation expenses to attend Steering Group meetings.

NOMINATIONS must be received by the Secretariat Deputy Administrator no later than 23:59 BST (GMT +1 hour) on 7 June 2001, and may be transmitted by fax (+44 1865 516311), or e-mail (callen@cochrane.co.uk) or by post to the Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat, 2nd Floor, Summertown Pavilion, Middle Way, Summertown, Oxford, OX2 7LG, UK.

For anyone new to the Collaboration's election process, or needing a reminder, a description of the voting procedure is available on the Collaboration's web site (go to <http://www.cochrane.org/>, click on Site Index, and click on Election procedure for Steering Group). This description will also be sent with the ballot papers to the relevant entities in this election on Friday 8 June 2001.

Steering Group members who will continue to serve for one to two more years:

- Chair:** Peter Langhorne (UK)
- CRG representatives (5):** Specifically representing Reviewers: Ruth Jepson (UK) Specifically representing RGCs and TSCs: Davina Gherzi (Australia) Specifically representing Co-ordinating Editors: Jim Neilson (UK) Representing all members of CRGs ('at large' position): David Wilkinson (Australia) Representing all members of CRGs ('at large' position): ELECTION IN PROGRESS
- Consumer Network representatives (2):** Samuel Ochieng (Kenya) ELECTION FOR ONE REPRESENTATIVE IN PROGRESS
- Centre representatives (4):** Youping Li (China) Elena Telaro (Italy) ELECTION FOR TWO REPRESENTATIVES IN PROGRESS
- Field representative (1):** Vittorio Demicheli (Italy)
- Methods Group representative (1):** ELECTION IN PROGRESS ■

For further information contact:

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Did you know?

There will be a meeting of **non UK-based review groups and centres** 4-5 June 2001 in Lisbon, Portugal. Host of the meeting is Ema Roque and the Cochrane Movement Disorders Group. Preliminary work for this project has been undertaken by Marica Ferri and others, and the meeting has been organised by Thilo Kober, RGC of the Haematological Malignancies Group. The target group for participants are RGCs, TSCs, and Centre Representatives from Cochrane entities located in continental Europe (i.e. outside UK). The conference format entails a business meeting and several target group oriented workshops. For further information contact the Haematological Malignancies Group.

The Editorial Base for the **Cochrane Haematological Malignancies Group** has moved to:

Cochrane Haematological Malignancies Group
Klinik I für Innere Medizin
Universität zu Köln
Kerpener Str. 15
50 924 Köln, Germany
Tel: +49 (0) 221 710 770 19
Fax: +49 (0) 221 710 770 24

The **Reporting Bias Methods Group** was officially registered with the Collaboration on 13 February 2001. The Convenors of this Group are Matthias Egger (Bristol, UK), David Moher (Ottawa, Canada) and Jonathan Sterne (Bristol, UK). The Group's Co-ordinator is Chris Bartlett, whose contact details are as follows:

Dr. Christopher Bartlett
Department of Social Medicine
University of Bristol
Canyng Hall
Whiteladies Road
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UK
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The **Cochrane Developmental, Psychosocial and Learning Problems Group** bids a sad farewell to Margaret Burke, who was their half-time TSC. Margaret has assumed the responsibilities of full-time TSC for the **Cochrane Heart Group**.

With a three year funding agreement now granted from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), the **Health Promotion and Public Health Field** is full steam ahead. Jodie Doyle has taken up the position of field administrator (full-time) and she joins Elizabeth Waters (part-time coordinator) in their new home within VicHealth. A new 'evolving' web site has been developed and comments are most welcome. Visit <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/cochrane> or e-mail cochrane@vichealth.vic.gov.au for more information or contact:

Jodie Doyle
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Australia
Tel: +61 3 9345 3296
Fax: +61 3 9345 3222
E-mail: jdoyle@vichealth.vic.gov.au

Vittorio Demicheli of Italy has been elected to replace Brian Berman in **representing Fields on the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group**. Vittorio's term of office will run until the Annual General Meeting in October 2003. His e-mail address is epidemi@tin.it.

The **Cochrane Vaccines Field** has moved to Alessandria, Italy. Their administrator is Dr. Antonella Barale. Their new contact information is:
Cochrane Vaccines Field
Servizio Sovrazonale di Epidemiologia – ASL 20
Via Venezia, 6-15100 Alessandria, Piemonte, Italy
Tel: +39 131 307841
Fax: +39 131 307847
E-mail: vaccinefield@asl20.piemonte.it

The following are now the agreed dates of the **next four Cochrane Colloquia**:

- 9-13 October 2001, Lyon, France
- 31 July-3 August 2002, Stavanger, Norway
- 25 October-1 November 2003, Barcelona, Spain [exact dates not yet known]
- 2-6 October 2004, Ottawa, Canada

The Monitoring and Registration Group recently approved that the abbreviation 'SACC' be used for the **South African Cochrane Centre**. This abbreviation was formerly used for the Cochrane Center in San Antonio, which closed last year.

The editorial base of the **Cochrane Injuries Group** has moved. Their new contact information is now:

Frances Bunn
Review Group Co-ordinator
Cochrane Injuries Group
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
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London WC1B 3DP
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7299 4738
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7299 4663
E-mail: Frances.Bunn@lshtm.ac.uk
<http://www.cochrane-injuries.lshtm.ac.uk>

Peter Smith has left the **Cochrane Dementia and Cognitive Impairment Group** to accept a post in the area of education and language teaching. We wish him all the best in this new endeavour and thank him for more than 5 years with the CDCIG.

Sarah Hetrick has left the **Menstrual Disorders and Subfertility Group** to pursue a career as a psychologist; Michelle Proctor has replaced her as the Review Group Co-ordinator.

Marjan Loep has resigned as administrator for the **Dutch Cochrane Centre** to focus on her job as clinical librarian at the Academic Medical Centre. Hanny Spitteler, a dietician,

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is the new secretary working 3 days per week. Rob Scholten, clinical epidemiologist, is working full-time and acts as first contact for the Dutch Cochrane Centre.

They can be reached at:

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E-mail: cochrane@amc.uva.nl

The Hypertension Group, whose reviews were being looked after temporarily by the Heart Group, has recently established its editorial base in Vancouver, Canada. Professor James Wright is now the Co-ordinating Editor of the Hypertension Group, and Ciprian Jauca is the Review Group Co-ordinator. The contact details for the editorial base are as follows:

Mr. Ciprian Jauca
Review Group Co-ordinator
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E-mail: jauca@ti.ubc.ca

The Canadian Cochrane Symposium 2001 will be held in Edmonton, Alberta, November 22-24, 2001. The Symposium will include presentations and hands-on sessions focused on the theme of 'Marketing the Evidence' for good health care decision making. Speakers will cover the Canadian and International perspectives of this topic. Deadline for submission of abstracts is June 15, 2001. For more information, please visit the Symposium web site at:
<http://www.ualberta.ca/CCNC/symposium2001>

Bernardo Soares, MD, has been appointed to the position of Administrator of Training and Coordinator of the **Brazilian Cochrane Centre**.

His contact details are:

Centro Cochrane do Brasil
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Vila Clementino
São Paulo, CEP 04039-001 Brasil
Tel: +55 11 5575 2970
Fax: +55 11 5570 0469
E-mail: cochrane.dmed@epm.br

Jimmy Volmink has resigned as Director of the **South African Cochrane Centre**. Jimmy will be relocating to Washington, DC, USA to assume the position of Director of Research and Evaluation at the Global Health Council. Many thanks to Jimmy for his contribution to the South African Cochrane Centre and best of luck in his new position.

The Health-Related Quality of Life Methods Group

was registered with the Cochrane Collaboration effective 8 May 2001. Please note that Veronique Staniek is on maternity leave. Juliette Longin will be acting as the contact person for the group and her contact details are as follows:

Juliette LONGIN
MAPI Research Institute
27, rue de la Villette
69003 Lyon
Tel: +04 72 13 66 67
Fax: +04 72 13 66 82
E-mail: jlongin@map.i.fr

Scrip World Pharmaceutical News (Issue no 2637, April 25th 2001, page 7) has reported that the Scottish Executive is making The Cochrane Library freely available to health professionals through their intranet this summer to ensure that they all have access to world class evidence of best practice. ■

The Cochrane Methodology Register

If you want to find articles about publication bias, double data entry, citation errors, collecting data for systematic reviews, heterogeneity in meta-analyses or any of dozens of other topics related to systematic reviews, The Cochrane Library contains the best single resource available. It's called the Cochrane Methodology Register.

The Cochrane Methodology Register contains records for research into the conduct of reviews and other evaluations of health care (such as randomised trials), along with details of descriptive articles, checklists and guides. The Register began as an appendix to the first edition of the Chalmers and Altman book, *Systematic Reviews*, a few years ago. Its birth was akin to the emptying of the relevant drawers in the filing cabinets of the likes of Doug Altman, Iain Chalmers, Tom Chalmers, Andy Oxman, and Dave Sackett. That first version contained a few hundred records.

The Register has grown steadily since then. But, in the last few months, it has more than doubled in size. It now contains nearly 3,500 records. Each of these has been assigned index terms relevant to methodology and these are listed in the Help file in The Cochrane Library. The recent expansion is due to a programme of journal and MEDLINE searching at the UK Cochrane Centre, with funding from the NHS R&D Programme. In addition, a simple scheme has been established to allow people to register ongoing research.

All this means that the Cochrane Methodology Register is now the best single source of information on the methods of systematic reviews and randomised trials. There is no other resource that contains the depth or the breadth of this literature. ■

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Cochrane Consumer Web Site Online

<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com>

When the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) designated the Cochrane consumer site as a "web site of the week" in March 2001, it was suggested that this new initiative could empower consumers. Their reviewer said:

"This site is likely to prove an incredibly useful (free) resource for patients and, I suspect, many of their doctors...After becoming well versed in the science and rationale of clinical trials, someone caring for a relative with, say, Alzheimer's disease can, within a couple of clicks, become equally well briefed about the 22 ongoing clinical trials that are currently recruiting patients" [1].

What is on it?

The Cochrane consumer web site has been developed by the Cochrane Collaboration's Consumer Network. The core of the web site is Cochrane reviews: the abstracts, and, where they are available, consumer summaries ('synopses' - see article on page 1). It is much more than that, though. It is also a launching point for consumers wanting access to free, evidence-based and non-commercial health information on the internet. The web site also includes materials to help people understand health care research, as well as information about trials and finding trials in which consumers can participate.

Features include:

- Cochrane abstracts and consumer summaries, searchable by plain text searching - and browsing in a plain language system
- Automatic free e-mail updates (with the option of choosing only notification of Cochrane reviews in your area of interest, and several other options)
- The Network's quarterly digest of 'What's New' in Cochrane reviews

- A consumer's guide to finding health care information on the internet - with many links to evidence-based and non-commercial sites, including non-English resources
- Links to medical glossaries for consumers (including translations from English to European languages)
- News and discussion section - including online discussions
- Online user rating of the site
- A section and services for journalists

Resources to support consumer participation in the Cochrane Collaboration

Included on 'Cochrane Consumer' is the full range of updated and expanded resources to help support consumer participation in the Cochrane Collaboration:

- Feedback guides for when a person is asked to comment on a draft protocol or review, and what is a consumer perspective on a Cochrane review
- A guide to making a comment on a published Cochrane protocol or review
- Resources to help Cochrane collaborative review groups develop policies and materials for consumer participation (including a library of examples of consumer feedback forms from Cochrane collaborative review groups)
- Plain language glossary of research terms

All the Consumer Network's news letters are there (you can sign up for e-mail updates of those too). Network events and opportunities will also be listed there.

What's on the horizon for the consumer web site?

With initial funding extending maintenance and development of this web site to the middle of 2006*, the Network will be continually improving and expanding the web site in many exciting ways over the next few years. We welcome all comments, criticisms and suggestions for what could be improved or added - small or large. (There will also be a workshop at the Colloquium in Lyon this October [see page 5], for 'brainstorming' about what we could do with this web site.)

By the end of 2001, we hope to be able to add consumer summaries for all Cochrane reviews (see separate article on synopses, page 1). From June, we will be producing 'hot topics' of consumer health information based on information from Cochrane reviews: monthly at first, but soon weekly. Once again, people will be able to sign up for automatic notification of those as well.

More resources for journalists are on the drawing board. We are planning slowly to build a range of materials for people to learn all about health care research: how to make sense of it, understand the different types and styles of research, and how to tell whether research is reliable. There will be more in languages other than English, and more on ethics and research. It will provide more resources for consumer participation - both as a 'patient' in a trial, and as a consumer getting involved in Cochrane reviews. We are planning an on-line 'journal club' for consumers to discuss particular Cochrane protocols and reviews.

Continued page 11...

(Keeping up with 'Cochrane Consumer' developments is another 'free update' option from the site.)

If you can help spread the word, contact me and I'll send you an e-mail you could forward to people, organisations or discussion lists, and/or a hard copy flyer you could print out. We would also welcome people putting in links from other web sites to us. If you can support the development of any innovations, we would like to hear from you too.



A Review Will Not Be Rejected if it Meets the Cochrane Quality Criteria

We all know and feel the pressure to publish. Our careers and sometimes livelihoods depend on the number of publications that we produce. We conceive an idea, sweat through the project, which eventually culminates in the manuscript being submitted to any of thousands of journals that exist today.

In the process, we are hoping that the only criterion that will be used in the decision as to whether our article will be accepted for publication will be the validity of our idea and the quality of our paper. However, as so many editors of the leading medical journals have admitted over the years, these are often not the most important criteria, which are used in making decisions about publication. Rather, it is often newsworthiness, a perceived interest of a readership, or even entertainment value that may decide destiny of a given scientific work.

With so many web sites making full use of the internet's ability to broadcast massive amounts of information (and misinformation), web sites more concerned with quality than quantity are thin on the ground. This web site has an ambitious goal: trying not only to provide reliable, easy to understand information, but also enhancing consumers' ability to cut through the rest of the information that is thrown at them. It is a key way that the Consumer Network is contributing to the Collaboration's central mission: to help people make informed decisions about health care. ■

The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews is the only publication that exists today that guarantees that each contribution will be accepted, provided that a review meets the Cochrane (high) quality standards. The motto of the Cochrane Collaboration has always been that it is the quality that matters.

In its goal to produce high quality, unbiased, systematic reviews on the effects of health care interventions, the Cochrane Collaboration actually helps the authors to improve their work in order to meet rigorous, but necessary quality criteria before a contribution is finally accepted for publication. Since the authors can be assured that their reviews will be accepted for publication, all they need to do is to strive to meet the Cochrane Collaboration criteria to produce and maintain high quality systematic reviews.

Hilda Bastian

Convenor, Cochrane Consumer Network
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<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com>

* The Consumer Network gratefully acknowledges Medibank Private Limited, Australia, for its sponsorship of the web site's development and maintenance.

REFERENCE

1. Richards T. Web site of the week: empowering consumers (review). *BMJ* 2001; 322: 562.

This policy – quality matters – has also been recognized by the leading medical journals such as JAMA, The Lancet, and BMJ. These journals have indicated that they will look favourably upon the review published in The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, although they do not guarantee publication. The trademark of prestige, when it comes to systematic reviews may actually be “Have you done your Cochrane Systematic Review yet?” So, an effort placed into creating the Cochrane Systematic Review will actually result in a double payment: the prestige associated with high quality publication(s) that are guaranteed to be published. ■

Benjamin Djulbegovic,

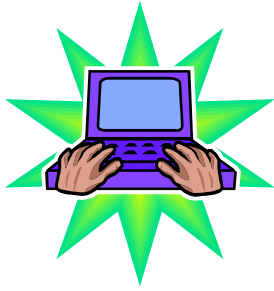
Editor, Haematological Malignancies Group

Thilo Kober,

Co-ordinator, Haematological Malignancies Group

Andreas Engert,

Co-ordinating Editor, Haematological Malignancies Group



Advisory Group Changes Its Name and Extends Its Remit

The Software Development Group has changed its name to the Information Management System Group (IMSG). The IMSG is an advisory group to the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group (CCSG).

Background

For several years now, the term *Information Management System* has been used internally within the Cochrane Collaboration to describe the software and the processes used by reviewers and review groups to bring reviews and modules from the stages of preparation and maintenance to publication on *The Cochrane Library*. The planning and development of these processes has been the responsibility of the former Software Development Group, and its members felt that the new name would better describe what the Group is about.

At the same time as approving the name change, the CCSG also agreed that the IMSG should be responsible for overseeing the development of any software developed in-house which is to be used Collaboration-wide (for instance, by the editorial bases of all review groups).

Advisory groups

The Information Management System Group presently works closely with three advisory groups to help ensure that the systems and the software developed under its aegis are based on input and advice from its users: The Criticism Management Advisory Group, the ModMan Advisory Group, and the RevMan Advisory Group.

New advisory groups

The IMSG recently assumed responsibility for overseeing the development of the central database of contact details of people within the Collaboration. This database is currently maintained in the software called HIREx. A new advisory group, the Contact Information Advisory Group, will be established to advise the IMSG on the development of the database. This will include considerations about adopting new software that can better serve the needs of the Collaboration.

In recognition of the fact that the IMSG does not have the time or sufficient expertise to discuss technical issues in enough detail, the Group has decided to establish a Technical Advisory Group, whose remit will be to advise on technical issues pertinent to matters on the agenda of the IMSG.

The call for volunteers to become members of the above two new advisory groups will take place after convenors have been identified (see below).

Expansion of membership of the IMSG

The Information Management System Group has started preparatory work for the next generation of the Information Management System, and to assist in this process we are seeking to expand our membership by three new members:

- Someone to represent Cochrane contributors from countries where information technology is not as

readily available as it is in, for example, western Europe.

- Someone to convene a Contact Information Advisory Group to the IMSG.
- Someone to convene a Technical Advisory Group to the IMSG.

If you would like to be considered for one of the above three positions, please send an application by 9 July 2001 to Monica Fischer (details below) stating the reasons why you wish to become a member and the skills you would bring to the IMSG. The current members of the IMSG will review the applications and put forward their candidates to the CCSG for approval. To obtain more information about the new positions (a brief list of desirable skills and backgrounds, implications on workload and available funding for participating in the Group's work) go to <http://www.cochrane.dk/imsgr>. This site also contains general information about the IMSG and its advisory groups, including remits, minutes of past meetings and lists of current members. You are also very welcome to contact me directly. ■

Monica Fischer,

Convenor, Information Management System Group

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The San Francisco Cochrane Center has a Visiting Scholar from Barcelona, Spain

Ferran Ariza, MD, from the Clinical Epidemiology and Public Health Department/ Iberoamerican Cochrane Centre, Hospital de Sant Pau, Barcelona, Spain, is working on an AIDS project with the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Collaborative Review Group. He is also collaborating with Melissa Ober at the San Francisco Cochrane Center on developing the SFCC web site and other projects.

The **HIV/AIDS Collaborative Review Group** (San Francisco, USA) and the **Iberoamerican Cochrane Centre** (Barcelona, Spain) are working together on a research project on AIDS and HIV. The project is sponsored by FIPSE, a public organization that promotes

research on AIDS in Spain. The main goals of the project are:

1. To identify and classify the greatest possible number of randomized clinical trials and controlled clinical trials of HIV/AIDS intervention studies conducted in Spain between 1980 and 1999.
2. To identify RCTs and CCTs through handsearching international Spanish-language AIDS specialty journals and other AIDS specialty journals.
3. To make identified studies available to reviewers through the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group's specialized registry and on The Cochrane Library.

The research will be extended to include journals from Latin America and the United States. Ferran arrived in San Francisco in late February to handsearch American journals on HIV/AIDS available only in the States, and is also serving as a link between the Iberoamerican Cochrane Centre and the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Collaborative Review Group. ■

Melissa Ober

*San Francisco Cochrane Center
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New Staff Position Within the Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat

Applications are invited to fill the position of Quality Improvement Manager in the Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat. The aim of this position will be to improve the quality and increase the number of Cochrane reviews, with two main objectives:

1. to ensure Cochrane reviews meet an appropriate standard, which includes keeping them up to date. (The quality and content of individual Cochrane reviews are the responsibility of Collaborative Review Groups, but the Quality Improvement Manager would help them to meet this goal); and
2. to help avoid unnecessary duplication by working with the editorial teams of the Collaborative Review Groups to develop and keep up-to-date procedures and mechanisms for

managing the production and maintenance of Cochrane reviews.

The following two areas have been identified as priorities: Firstly, to promote and support implementation of effective mechanisms for improving the quality of reviews, including developing strategies for

- (a) improving scientific editing,
- (b) improving copy editing,
- (c) post-publication improvement of reviews, and
- (d) keeping reviews up-to-date.

The second priority will be to promote and support effective mechanisms for managing the workload of Collaborative Review Groups (including identifying suitable training and support for Review Group Co-ordinators, Trials Search Co-ordinators and others in the editorial teams of Collaborative

Review Groups), in order to help them improve the quality and number of Cochrane reviews.

For further information, and details of the terms and conditions of this post, visit the Collaboration web site ('What's new'), or contact:

Jini Hetherington,
Secretariat Administrator
Tel: +44 1865 310 138

Applicants should apply in writing, enclosing a curriculum vitae and the contact details of two referees, to

The Administrator
Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat
P.O. Box 726, Oxford OX2 7UX UK

The deadline for receipt of applications is 1 June 2001, with interviews of shortlisted candidates taking place in Oxford on 28 June 2001. Expenses incurred in attending the interview will be reimbursed. ■

Training and Workshops

For up-to-date information about training and workshops check the Collaboration web site at <http://www.cochrane.org/cochrane/workshop.htm>

Date	Location	Type of workshop
Statistics Methods Group		
9-13 July 2001	Oxford, UK	A Course for Cochrane Statisticians
Australasian Cochrane Centre		
31 May 2001	Adelaide	Protocol Workshop
1 June 2001	Adelaide	RevMan Workshop
13-14 June 2001	Melbourne	Advanced Reviewers Workshop – Finishing School (1.5 days)
14-15 June 2001	Melbourne	Australasian Contributors Meeting
3 September 2001	Darwin	Protocol Workshop
4 September 2001	Darwin	RevMan Workshop
Brazilian Cochrane Centre		
25 May 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
29 June 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
10 August 2001	Natal	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
31 August 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
28 September 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
26 October 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
30 November 2001	São Paulo	Developing a Protocol for a Systematic Review/Getting a Review into RevMan
Canadian Cochrane Centre		
22 November 2001	Edmonton	Developing a Protocol for a Cochrane Systematic Review
23 November 2001	Edmonton	Completing a Cochrane Systematic Review
Dutch Cochrane Centre		
27 September 2001	Amsterdam	Developing a Systematic Review
29 November 2001	Amsterdam	Developing a Systematic Review
German Cochrane Centre		
May 2001	Freiburg	How to Develop a Protocol
May 2001	Freiburg	How to Enter Your Data Into RevMan
September 2001	Freiburg	Systematische Übersichtsarbeiten (Introductory)
Nordic Cochrane Centre		
On demand	Oslo & Copenhagen	Individual Sessions on Writing Protocols/Reviews and using RevMan
28 May – 1 June 2001	Oslo	How to Practice Evidence Based Health Care
June 2001	Copenhagen	Kursus I Evidensbaseret Klinik
24 September 2001	Copenhagen	Handsearching Workshop
25 September 2001	Copenhagen	Protocol Workshop
26 September 2001	Copenhagen	RevMan Workshop
New England Cochrane Center		
14-15 June 2001	Boston	How to Conduct & Interpret Meta-Analyses and Cochrane Systematic Reviews

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Date	Location	Type of workshop
UK Cochrane Centre		
24 May 2001	London	Developing a Protocol for a Review
25 May 2001	London	Getting a Review into RevMan
14 June 2001	Aberdeen	Developing a Protocol for a Review
15 June 2001	Aberdeen	Getting a Review into RevMan
12 July 2001	Oxford	Developing a Protocol for a Review
13 July 2001	Oxford	Getting a Review into RevMan
20 September 2001	Oxford	Developing a Protocol for a Review
21 September 2001	Oxford	Getting a Review into RevMan
25 October 2001	Oxford	Developing a Protocol for a Review
26 October 2001	Oxford	Getting a Review into RevMan
5 November 2001	Liverpool	Developing a Protocol for a Review
12 November 2001	Edinburgh	Getting a Review into RevMan
13 November 2001	Edinburgh	Developing a Protocol for a Review
3 December 2001	Liverpool	Getting a Review into RevMan
13 December 2001	London	Developing a Protocol for a Review
14 December 2001	London	Getting a Review into RevMan

Workshop on Cochrane Editing

The Nordic Cochrane Centre is hosting a workshop on Cochrane Editing 6–8 September 2001 in Copenhagen. The course is open to anyone involved in editing or writing Cochrane reviews. Preference will be given to editors, review group coordinators and authors of Cochrane reviews. The maximum number of participants will be 40. ■

If you would like further information or are interested in attending, please contact:

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How to Conduct and Interpret Meta-Analyses and Cochrane Systematic Reviews

The New England Cochrane Center will hold a two day training course, How to Conduct and Interpret Meta-Analyses and (Cochrane) Systematic Reviews on June 14th and 15th at the New England Cochrane Center in Boston. The course is designed for those interested in preparing reviews for the electronic Cochrane Library or interested in focused training in systematic reviews.

If you are interested in attending, please register as soon as possible as the limit of the course is 20 participants. For further information regarding the course contents, registration and/or hotel information please contact:

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Systematic Review Workshop in China

The 5th Workshop on Systematic Reviews was conducted by the Chinese Cochrane Centre (ChinCC) and the Australasian Cochrane Centre (ACC) in Chengdu, China at the end of February 2001. Chris Silagy, Sally Green and Steve McDonald from the ACC and Youping Li, Ming Liu and Jing Li from the ChinCC, were instructors for the three-day workshop. The main focus of this workshop was to train potential reviewers. The workshop involved 51 participants from over 10 provinces and cities, of whom 21 had registered titles with various Cochrane groups. The workshop was a mixture of lectures and training in the use of RevMan. In addition to the workshop, Steve McDonald helped develop search strategies to avoid overlapping between handsearching and electronic searching. The Chinese Cochrane Centre also organized some people to translate RevMan exercises for the workshop.

In May 2001, one or two reviewers from China will spend two months at the ACC working on their reviews. In June, two directors from the ChinCC and two members of the steering group of the ChinCC from the Ministry of Health will have a site visit to the ACC. ■

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Steve McDonald, *Australasian Cochrane Centre*

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