

◆ NEWSLETTER ◆

September, 2004

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Greetings! We hope you have had a lovely Summer, or Winter, as the case may be. This is our second Newsletter of the year. Much has transpired since the first.

**Our first North American Review Completion Course**

The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group held its first North American Review Completion Course on June 2 & 3, 2004. Gail Kennedy (RGC), Tara Horváth (Assistant RGC), and Madhukar Pai (Methods Editor) were the hosts of this event. The venue was the conference room of our office at the University of California, San Francisco's Institute for Global Health, located in downtown San Francisco. A total of nine San Francisco Bay Area reviewers were able to attend for at least one of the days; most were able to attend on both days. Some reviewers were new to Cochrane, and just beginning to write their protocols. Others were further along in the review process, or even nearing completion. Our conference room is well equipped with electrical outlets, so participants were able to plug in their laptop computers and have some dedicated time to work on their reviews.

After introductions on the first day, we learned from each person the status of his or her review; any obstacles (current or anticipated) that were slowing its progress in being written; and each participant's objectives for the Course. It was clear that most people were not entirely comfortable with RevMan. Some, too, had methodological questions, or felt a bit shaky in regard to writing and grammar. We vowed to address these concerns.

Using an LCD projector to project the HIV/AIDS Group's web site upon a screen, Gail and Madhu then took the participants on a tour of our "Interactive Road Map" tutorial of the systematic review process. Next, Madhu led a good discussion about the classification of study designs.

After a lunch of delicious sandwiches, Madhu gave a detailed exposition of the most effective ways to work with EndNote in exporting references to RevMan. The participants were thrilled to gain knowledge of the subtleties, tips and tricks attendant to this endeavor. Following this, some of the participants spent the rest of the afternoon quietly working on their reviews. Gail, Madhu and Tara met with several of them, individually.

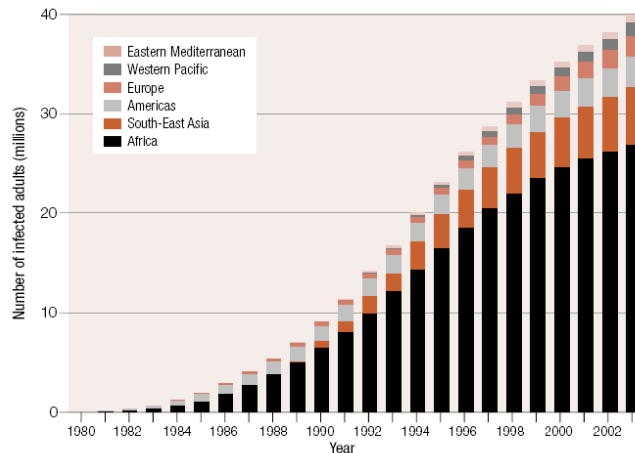
On the second day, Gail walked everyone through the processes of working in RevMan, pointing out many of the new features. After another nice lunch, several participants worked on their reviews for the rest of the day.

Post-course feedback, gleaned from returned questionnaires, was positive and enthusiastic. In the time since the course was held, the participants have submitted one review and two protocols, in addition to two new topics. We hope to hold these Review Completion Courses regularly, in addition to focused, half-day sessions on specific points, e.g. methodology, writing well, RevMan, and other potential problem areas.

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Figure 1.1 Estimated number of adults infected with HIV, by WHO region, 1980–2003 Source: World Health Organization. *World Health Report, 2004*



Making an Impact at the 15th International AIDS conference, Bangkok, Thailand

From July 11-16, 2004, Bangkok, Thailand, hosted the 15th International AIDS Conference. Over 17,000 delegates from 160 countries attended daily plenary sessions, oral and poster presentations, skills-building workshops and social events. The theme of the conference, “Access for all,” ran through all five specialist tracks: basic sciences; clinical research, treatment and care; epidemiology and prevention; social and economic issues; policy and program implementation. The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Review Group was well represented and the editorial team was delighted to see so many of our editors and reviewers participating in the conference.

We kicked off our Cochrane activities with an all-day Editorial meeting on the Sunday before the conference began. Another Editorial meeting was held later in the week and we are grateful to Dr. Tom Coates, Prof. Janet Darbyshire, and Mr. Kevin Osborne for taking the time to provide us with their useful insights and advice. Five of our reviewers were able to make the long trip across town to attend our Reviewer’s meeting where we were able to introduce them “virtually” to our new Trial Search Coordinator, Karishma Busgeeth, and give them an update of progress of the HIV/AIDS Trials Register. Thank you all for coming to see us.

Cochrane reviews were in evidence much more than at previous International AIDS Conferences. In addition to a number of poster presentations of recent Cochrane reviews, it was encouraging to see that the results of Cochrane reviews were often cited by other non-Cochrane researchers in their presentations. In one of the livelier debates: CNN vs. ABC (CNN = condoms, needles and negotiating skills vs. ABC = abstinence, be faithful, condoms) the debaters, Drs. Steven Sinding and Ted Green, both used the results of Cochrane reviews to defend their opposing standpoints! See the abstracts of all posters presented at the Conference, here: <http://www.medscape.com/ejiashome>

The highlight for all of us Cochranites took place during the final plenary session when Dr. Quarraisha Abdool Karim presented data from no less than three Cochrane reviews during her session on non-vaccine prevention methods. She clearly identified that when Cochrane reviews are unable to provide conclusive data, policy-makers and researchers need to conduct further randomised controlled trials. We have it on record that she stressed this at the press conference afterwards too.

Conference organisation and that of the hotel responsible for our meetings was impeccable and thanks must go to everyone who contributed to making the conference such a success. The only criticism of the conference is aimed at the scope of research studies presented, with high quality and sufficiently powered randomised controlled trials still mostly absent from the research agenda. We look forward to seeing more Cochrane reviewers at future conferences and are optimistic that our participation at these events will continue to improve the overall quality and rigour of the presented research.

– Nandi Siegfried,* Deputy Coordinating Editor, on behalf of the Editorial team

* Nandi was funded to attend the International AIDS Conference by a grant from UCSF’s Institute for Global Health (IGH)

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South Asian Cochrane Network systematic reviews workshop in Vellore, India

In response to a growing need to have a Cochrane presence in the Asian subcontinent, the Australasian Cochrane Centre supported the formation of the South Asian Cochrane Network to cater to the training and support needs of people from South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives). On July 5-7, 2004, at the Christian Medical College in Vellore (Tamil Nadu), India, the South Asian Cochrane Network and **Dr. Prathap Tharyan** hosted a residential workshop on systematic reviews and meta-analysis for people from the region who are currently undertaking or to hope to shortly commence Cochrane systematic reviews. The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group helped to sponsor this event. Twenty-six participants from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were in attendance, in addition to guest lecturers from around the world. Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group Coordinating Editor **Dr. George Rutherford** spoke on two newer areas in systematic reviewing: systematic reviews of diagnostic and screening tests, and of preventive studies.

The emphasis of the workshop was on participatory learning and the participants had ample opportunities to discuss their own titles and protocols in small groups, explore the Cochrane Library, and enter data into RevMan through the individual computers that were provided for them. They also were able to establish ties that should help in future networking activities. The feedback from the participants was very positive and future workshops of this nature are likely to be useful. In the two months since the workshop was held, the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group has registered two new titles from participants, and recognized six new reviewers. In late November, immediately preceding a regional HIV/AIDS conference, **Dr. Sreekumaran Nair** and colleagues will hold a one-day workshop in Pariyaram (Kerala) on the topic of systematic reviews and the Cochrane Collaboration. They will also discuss our plans for the implementation of a mentoring program for South Asian Cochrane reviewers interested in HIV/AIDS topics, modeled after the program we helped to develop with the South African Cochrane Centre.

Other notes of note

- ◆ **Madhu Pai** *et al* recently published a tutorial on systematic reviews in the National Medical Journal of India. This is the basis of our Interactive Roadmap, developed by Madhu, for conducting a systematic review. You can easily find both the Roadmap and the tutorial on our web site: <http://www.igh.org/Cochrane>.
- ◆ In early April, **George Rutherford**, **Gail Kennedy** and **Tara Horváth** attended the US Cochrane Center's Meeting in Providence. It was a fantastic meeting on the beautiful campus of Brown University, though the rain hardly relented. George gave one presentation; Gail and Tara gave another, in addition to presenting two posters.
- ◆ With the kind financial assistance of the Nordic Cochrane Centre, **Tara** traveled to Toronto in May, where she attended a workshop on using the new Contact Database.
- ◆ In July, the Institute of Medicine (National Academies of Science, USA) released a new, 430-page consensus committee report entitled "Scaling Up Treatment for the Global AIDS Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities." The committee members drew upon many sources, including the "Evidence Assessment of Strategies for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care," produced by our Group earlier this year. The Evidence Assessment can be found on our web site: <http://www.igh.org/Cochrane>; the Institute of Medicine's report can be read online at the National Academies Press: <http://books.nap.edu/catalog/11043.html>
- ◆ In response to an appeal from the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), which is coordinating a "Global Review of Access to Information for Health Professionals in Developing Countries," to be published in November of this year, **Karishma** has written a short piece on the topic of HIV/AIDS information. In particular, she discusses the specialized HIV/AIDS clinical trials registry that she is developing for us. You will be able to read it here: <http://www.inasp.info/newslet/index.html>
- ◆ **George**, **Gail**, and **Tara** from San Francisco, and **Karishma** from Cape Town, are planning to attend the Colloquium in Ottawa. We hope to meet you there!

QUIZ! Without consulting a map, can you name the ten countries through which the Equator passes?

ANSWER: Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Gabon, Congo, D. R. Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and Indonesia

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People

- ✦ We're glad to announce that **Dr. Nandi Siegfried**, co-Director of the South African Cochrane Centre (SACC), has been appointed our Deputy Coordinating Editor! The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group has a satellite editorial base at the SACC, which helps us in addressing issues of relevance to areas of the world most affected by the pandemic, and offering resources to reviewers throughout sub-Saharan Africa.
- ✦ Welcome to **Karishma Busgeeth**, who joins us as Trial Search Coordinator! Karishma is from Mauritius, but has been staying in South Africa for the past six years. She is now based at the South African Cochrane Centre in Cape Town. She has been developing and maintaining bibliographic databases of HIV/AIDS clinical trials, and provides specialized information support services to the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Review Group and to Cochrane reviewers.
- ✦ Many, many thanks to **Elizabeth Pienaar**, Information Specialist of the SACC, who has served as our interim Trial Search Coordinator for the past few years! She participated on our Editorial team, and offered valuable feedback and training to help get Karishma up to speed in her new post.
- ✦ Welcome to **Rita Hamad**, who joins us in San Francisco as a Research Assistant! Rita graduated from Harvard with a B.A. in Chemistry in 2003, and is currently applying to medical school. She has previously interned at the HIV/AIDS Department of the World Health Organization, and the Center for Research on Population and Health at the American University of Beirut.
- ✦ **Tara Horváth** is now our Assistant Review Group Coordinator!
- ✦ **Anne Sunderland** has departed for graduate training at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health! Good luck, Anne!

The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group is organized around an Editorial Base led by Coordinating Editor Dr. George Rutherford of the University of California, San Francisco, USA (UCSF). The Review Group Coordinator is Ms. Gail Kennedy (UCSF). Ms. Tara Horváth (UCSF) is Assistant Review Group Coordinator. Ms. Rita Hamad is our Research Assistant. Our Trial Search Coordinator is Ms. Karishma Busgeeth. Karishma works from our Satellite Editorial Base at the South African Cochrane Centre (SACC). Scott Allison is our web site's Guru.

Editors

Deputy Coordinating Editor: Dr. Nandi Siegfried (SACC)
Consumer Editor: Mr. Kevin Osborne (International Planned Parenthood Federation, UK)
Criticism Editor: Dr. Carlos Cáceres (Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Peru)
Methods Editor: Dr. Madhukar Pai (UC Berkeley)
Statistical Editor: Dr. Lize van der Merwe (SACC)

*Editors of the four working groups:***Treatment, Diagnostics and Prognostics**

Dr. Janet Darbyshire (University College, London, UK)
 Dr. John Ioannidis (University of Ioannina, Greece)
 Dr. Peter Reiss (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Behavioral, Social and Policy Prevention

Dr. Greet Peersman (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
 Dr. Mario Bronfman (Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, México)
 Dr. Tom Coates (UCLA)

Biomedical Prevention

Dr. John Kaldor (University of New South Wales, Australia)

Health Care Services

Dr. Rick Glazier (University of Toronto, Canada)



The Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group

Have you visited?

<http://www.igh.org/Cochrane>
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