

# Steering Group Bulletin

Dublin Colloquium Steering Group Meeting, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006

No. 1

## Improving communication within the Collaboration

*Responding to the recommendations of the Steering Group Review*

**Lorne Becker and Adrian Grant**  
Co-Chairs, The Cochrane Collaboration

Over the last year, Alessandro Liberati and his team conducted an extensive review of the function of the Collaboration's Steering Group (see report, page 5). One clear message is that communication within the Collaboration must improve. In particular, some of those responding to the review's survey were unsure of what the Steering Group does, and how.

This bulletin is a small first step to improve communication. Minutes of Steering Group meetings are circulated to entities after each meeting, but not everyone wants to read minutes. Using this new bulletin, we will report the Steering Group's decisions and deliberations in a more digestible form. ♦

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## CENTRAL

*What next for the Cochrane trials register?*

**Dymphna Hermans**  
TSCs' Representative

For 12 years, the US Cochrane Center oversaw the coordination of the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL). The Collaboration is grateful for this effort, which established the CENTRAL database as one of the world's leading trials registers. With their move to Johns Hopkins, and associated changes to their funding, the USCC could no longer carry on with this task.

In response, in late 2005 the Steering Group set up a task force - the CENTRAL Vision Group or 'CVG' - to look at what we need for the future. After extensive surveys and interviews throughout the Collaboration and beyond, the CVG presented their report in Dublin - see [www.cochrane.org/admin/structure.htm#cvg](http://www.cochrane.org/admin/structure.htm#cvg).

The key recommendations are that:

- We need a replacement for CENTRAL, and it should be study-based (but see below).
- All studies potentially useful in the production of Cochrane reviews should be included.
- The register should be web-based and accessed through the Information Management System.
- The Collaboration should appoint someone to manage the project.

Whilst accepting that there should be a study-based register and that there should be someone appointed to manage this, the Steering Group agreed that more discussion and consultation would be required before firm plans were made. Our CEO was charged to produce a job description by January 2007, so that, after approval by the Steering Group, the recruitment process can start as soon as possible. The post holder will be required to conduct further consultation on the detail of the Register and to produce an implementation plan, including extensive piloting. ► *continued page 3*

## Feedback in Cochrane reviews

*A new approach*

### Lorne Becker

Co-Chair, Steering Group; Convenor, Publishing Policy Group

Sherri Sheinfeld Gorin, Convenor of the Feedback Management Advisory Group (FMAG), recommended immediate changes to the feedback system.

Our current feedback system for Cochrane reviews – formerly the ‘Comments and Criticisms’ system – hasn’t been meeting the needs of either the Collaboration or of readers. We need to fix this.

### What was wrong with it?

At present, two very different versions of feedback are possible. One allows ‘rapid review’, posting of on-line comments without editorial review. The other allows ‘formal feedback’, based on formal guidelines and involving feedback editors, authors, and editorial base staff. Having two formats has caused confusion.

‘Rapid review’ allows anyone at any time to post comments that are immediately visible to readers of Cochrane reviews. The aim is to stimulate lively discussion around key issues in a review. Unfortunately, that hasn’t been happening. We want our feedback system to mirror best practice in high quality journals. In a survey of such publications, FMAG found that making such a lively discussion happen is a difficult undertaking.

### What’s the new feedback process?

The Steering Group agreed to discontinue the unedited ‘rapid review’ format, and concentrate on improving the ‘formal feedback’ process, corresponding more closely to the ‘letters to the editor’ sections of print journals. Submitted comments are edited by the feedback editor, working with the author of the comment. Review authors have an opportunity to comment, and the results appear as part of the review in *The Cochrane Library*. Providing timely responses to all submitted comments is the commitment – making it work is the challenge. ♦

## Translation

*Spanish, Chinese, what else?*

### Jordi Pardo

Outgoing Centre Staff representative

“Promoting access ... to meet the needs of users worldwide”. Sounds simple enough, it’s one of our key principles, but how do we do this for non-English speakers? And access to what?

### Database of RCTs published in China

Cochrane review authors need access to high quality information from around the world. English-language sources are extensive, but limited. Including non-English language trial reports is one of the things that make Cochrane reviews different. At the Dublin meeting, the Steering Group agreed in principle to establish a database of RCTs published in China, and to support the translation of a number of abstracts of reports of quality-assured randomised controlled trials from Chinese into English. Containing RCTs of both Western and Chinese medicine, the database will be available to authors to help simplify the process of finding and assessing the validity of these trials, ensuring that this vital and fascinating resource is utilised globally. Details of how and where to find the resource, and of the timeline for when it will become available, will be announced in 2007.

### La Biblioteca Cochrane Plus

The Iberoamerican Cochrane Centre, working with Update Software, produces a Spanish version of *The Cochrane Library*, meeting the needs of speakers of one of the world’s commonest languages. Translating *The Library* costs money, and this used to be supported by a commercial company. That funding is no longer available, so the Steering Group approved two years of bridge funding until new resources are found, ensuring that La Biblioteca Cochrane Plus will remain available.

### Other languages?

Agreeing to give translation a higher priority, and working with our publishers and others, the Steering Group will be looking for new ways to translate Cochrane material into other languages. ♦

## WHY NOT JOIN THE STEERING GROUP?

With the election of Adrian Grant to the position of Co-Chair, there is a vacancy for a Co-ordinating Editors' representative, to serve in office until October 2009 (see election details, [www.cochrane.org/ccsg/2006\\_elections\\_page.htm](http://www.cochrane.org/ccsg/2006_elections_page.htm) ).

Maintaining a strong and effective Collaboration needs well-qualified, enthusiastic and dedicated people to put themselves forward for election to the Steering Group. They then need to be able to devote considerable time and effort to their duties. If you meet the criteria, and you have the time to take on this important task, why not put yourself forward for election, for this or for other posts as they are advertised?

The full electoral process is detailed on the website at: [www.cochrane.org/ccsg/ccsg\\_election\\_process\\_May06.doc](http://www.cochrane.org/ccsg/ccsg_election_process_May06.doc).

## STEERING GROUP MEETINGS

The Steering Group meets twice a year. At the annual Colloquium, for one and a half days, and a mid-year meeting for three days, six months later. Meetings are intensive and require considerable preparation by participants. Forthcoming dates are as follows:

### 2007 mid-year meeting

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 20 - 22 April 2007

To include strategic session with Centre Directors and Co-ordinating Editors, focussing on: implementing the Steering Group Review; undertaking a strategic review of The Collaboration; and discussions about quality improvement processes to ensure high quality Cochrane systematic reviews, including whether to establish an editorial board and editor-in-chief for *The Cochrane Library*.

### 2007 Colloquium meeting

Sao Paulo, Brazil, 20 + 23 October 2007

### 2008 mid-year meeting

Vellore, India, 11 – 13 April 2008

### 2008 Colloquium Meeting

Freiburg, Germany, 2 + 5 October 2008

### 2009 mid-year meeting

Copenhagen, Denmark, Late March / early April 2009

## CENTRAL

*continued from page 1*

► A new register won't be ready for some time, so a temporary solution will be implemented straightaway. This allows downloading of MEDLINE and EMBASE records and the submission of specialised registers and handsearch results so that we can keep CENTRAL up-to-date until a new register becomes available. A part-time post will be funded to provide liaison between the Collaboration as a whole, the TSCs and the publishers during the interim period.

In endorsing the recommendation that the new register should be study-based, we recognised that the resource implications of this could be huge. Many Groups may not be in a position to go study-based unless additional funding is found. So we agreed that a hybrid design should be produced that would allow submission of reference-based as well as study-based registers. This design would allow individual CRGs the choice to implement, for themselves, what worked best and was achievable within their context and at their own pace.

We would be grateful for your feedback on the report – please send to Karen Robinson: [krobin@jhmi.edu](mailto:krobin@jhmi.edu). ♦

## RevMan 5

### *Rollout strategy*

#### **Monica Kjeldstrøm**

Trading Company Director, IMS Director

A major update to the Collaboration's review writing tool, RevMan, is scheduled for mid-2007.

Learning from the experience of rolling out RevMan 4, the Steering Group accepted the recommendation of the IMS Team and IMS Group (who maintain oversight of the Collaboration's software programmes) that there should be a staged rollout programme for RevMan 5. The exact timing has yet to be determined, but the staged programme will be as follows. Starting no later than one month after a 'module submission' deadline:

- For the first issue of *The Cochrane Library*, authors and CRGs **can** submit in RevMan 5 format;
- For the second issue, authors and CRGs **are encouraged to** submit in RevMan 5 format;
- For the third issue, authors and CRGs **must** submit in RevMan 5 format. ♦

## Finance and sustainability

*Making best use of precious resources*

**Nick Royle**

Chief Executive Officer

**Rob Scholten**

Co-Convenor, MRG

Managing the resources of a network such as the Collaboration presents unique challenges. With each entity financially independent, the work of the Monitoring and Registration Group (MRG) in collating and assessing the financial and organisational viability of each entity, and the work of entities in assembling that information, is a mammoth but vital task, and depends entirely on everyone's goodwill and enthusiasm.

### What's the current picture?

The Steering Group considers three pieces of information: firstly, core income, principally from publishing, and its impact on the Collaboration's cash flow forecast; secondly, financial information provided by entities (monitoring 'Part B' cash flow forecasts); and thirdly, the contextual information on entities' performance and viability gathered through the MRG's annual monitoring process.

Core income available to the Collaboration, principally through publishing, is in a healthy state and steadily rising. The importance of this income, which has no externally set objectives or deliverables attached and can be directed as the Collaboration wishes, cannot be underestimated, and allows us to push forward initiatives that it would be extremely hard to attract external funding for, such as software development and quality improvement projects. Core income and expenditure make up the figures published each year in our audited financial statements and accounts (see the website for details). However, what is clear from the accounts is that, for the foreseeable future, the Collaboration will not be in a position to fund entities except on the margins (see announcements of new funding programmes below).

Although entities remain financially stretched, the overall picture is one of a steadily rising level of funding, with Cochrane entities continuing to enjoy some success in funding applications. Based on figures supplied by entities, overall income appears to

have risen by around 20% per annum in both of the last two years to a current level of over £11 million. However, whilst some entities appear to be doing well financially, others are plainly struggling, some badly, and the Steering Group will continue to explore ways in which entities can be assisted in their fund-raising efforts.

### New Cochrane funding initiatives

The demand on core resources continues to grow. A number of vital projects formerly funded by Centres are now a core responsibility, including a large contribution to the Information Management System, website funding, and soon the CENTRAL team. These demands will continue to grow.

However, with rising publication revenue, the Collaboration is now in a position to make more resources available to entities, and hopefully these initiatives will continue to expand. The Steering Group is therefore pleased to announce two new funding streams for Cochrane entities:

### Cochrane Opportunities Fund

Totalling around £100,000 per annum to start with, it is envisaged that, through a Request For Proposals (RFP) mechanism, around four to five projects will benefit from this fund. Applications will be asked to address high priority elements of the Strategic Plan, and bids from entities that work together collaboratively will be particularly welcomed.

### Cochrane Prioritisation Fund

Totalling £100,000, this one-off funding programme will aim to address the valid concerns of stakeholders that we should be seen to be prioritising topics for Cochrane reviews. As with the Opportunities Fund, a competitive Request For Proposals mechanism will probably identify around four to five projects to benefit from the Fund.

### Process?

The process for both Funds will be announced by the end of January 2007, with funding available from April 2007. ♦

## Steering Group Review

*A positive response*

### Mark Davies

Outgoing Co-Chair

Every five years the Steering Group has a review of its functions and activities, ensuring that it remains focussed, professional and effective. The review is run by a non-Steering Group person, and this time around that role was ably fulfilled by Alessandro Liberati, Director of the Italian Cochrane Centre, and a team of both internal and external members.

### Thanks to those who contributed

Firstly, let me say how much the Steering Group appreciates the review panel's hard work, and the input of all who contributed. This has made it easier to consider and accept the results, arising as they do from thorough and extensive consultation with current and previous Steering Group members and with members of Cochrane entities.

### What did the review say?

Whilst reflecting on the enormous voluntary efforts of Steering Group members on the Collaboration's behalf, the review's key recommendations included: improving internal communication; the leadership role of the Steering Group; the need to focus on policy issues and not micro-management; maintaining a focus on review production and maintenance; and consideration of the Steering Group's role in policy enforcement.

### What next?

A review is pointless if nothing happens as a result. The full report is available on the Cochrane website, together with a web survey link to which you are invited to send feedback and suggestions for implementing the recommendations. Some of the recommendations are already being actively addressed (such as through this Bulletin), and our CEO is preparing a discussion document for the Steering Group with proposals and an action plan. These will be a major topic at the next full Steering Group meeting in Amsterdam, April 2007. ♦

## Publishing *The Cochrane Library*

*Five more years?*

### Nick Royle

Chief Executive Officer

In February 2003, after a long and exhaustive competitive tendering exercise, John Wiley and Sons Ltd. became our publishing partners for *The Cochrane Library*. The current contract runs until the end of 2008, but in order to ensure continuity and continued investment, the Steering Group considered that now was the time to decide whether we should seek to extend the contract, or to re-tender.

### Do we stay or do we go now?

In choosing a publisher, The Collaboration considered seven main criteria, and it is against these that we measure success. Wiley committed themselves to maintaining quality, increasing distribution, enhancing revenue, increasing free access to reviews, good marketing quality and global reach, gaining academic credibility through inclusion in ISI and gaining an impact factor, and producing Cochrane output in languages other than English. The Steering Group assessed that considerable progress had been made in the first six of these, but that progress was limited on the seventh. Overall, though, the publication arrangements were judged a success, and the decision was taken that, given sufficient incentives, Wiley could be offered an extension to the contract.

### Five more years?

Good governance dictates that organisations re-tender their contracts periodically. Having considered Wiley's track-record of achievement against the contract criteria, the Steering Group decided that the publication contract could be extended by up to five years, after which it would need to be re-tendered. The degree of extension available to Wiley depends on the incentives that they can offer.

### Cochrane book series and journals

People within Cochrane continue to work with Wiley to develop book and journal ideas. If you have a book idea, contact Lucy Sayer, [LSayer@wiley.co.uk](mailto:LSayer@wiley.co.uk). ♦

## Steering Group news in brief

### New Steering Group members

In Dublin, **Joy Oliver** took over from **Jordi Pardo** as Centre Staff representative. Joy is the Centre Administrator at the South African Cochrane Centre and also an Assistant Review Group Co-ordinator with the HIV/AIDS Group. Warm thanks were expressed to Jordi, who has contributed greatly, particularly on developing country, translation and publishing matters.

**Adrian Grant** has taken over from **Steff Lewis** and **Lorne Becker** from **Mark Davies** as the new Co-Chairs. The Collaboration's Co-Chairs have to make a huge personal and professional commitment to the role, and Adrian and Lorne have the full support of all Members.

**Donna Gillies** takes over from **Jon Deeks** as Treasurer. Jon has done a fantastic job in this hard-working and unsung but vitally important role, and we wish Donna well in her new task.

### Rationale for 'Cochrane Library First'

It has been Cochrane policy for many years that authors are strongly encouraged not to publish elsewhere before their review is ready for publication in *The Cochrane Library*. Following a cry for help from some CRGs who had experienced authors taking their support and then not publishing in *The Library* at all, a rationale for this policy was published. This seems to have caused more problems than it solved, and has therefore been withdrawn for re-working. The policy, however, remains unchanged and a reworked rationale will be published in due course.

### Co-registration and co-publication with The Campbell Collaboration

We continue to work closely with The Campbell Collaboration on areas of shared interest. Bob Boruch and Julia Littell attended our Steering Group meetings in Dublin. Although some details still need working out, we reaffirmed our support in principle for co-registration and co-publication of reviews by the two Collaborations.

### Summary of Findings tables

The Steering Group has previously discussed Summary of Findings (SoF) tables as an addition to Cochrane

reviews. They aim to improve their accessibility, quality and value. RevMan 5 is being designed to accommodate their inclusion. The group working on implementation of SoF tables put forward a request for funding to hire staff who would draft SoF tables for 500 existing Cochrane reviews as a way of getting the implementation of this new feature started. The Steering Group noted that there were still a number of unanswered questions about the final format, content and usability of SoF tables – some of which were discussed in more detail in a number of meetings during the Colloquium. We therefore felt it was premature to fund such a large implementation project at this stage, and encouraged the group to do additional assessment, evaluation, and pilot testing first.

### Diagnostic tests

Plans for inclusion of reviews of diagnostic test accuracy continue to move forward. Ten pilot reviews are currently in production. A handbook is being prepared, and should become available next year. Protocols for the pilot reviews will be published in *The Cochrane Library*, beginning very soon. Published as part of the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Cochrane Diagnostic Reviews will be clearly distinguishable from Cochrane Reviews of Interventions, and will also be published in parallel in a new Cochrane diagnostic 'derivative journal'. An editorial board including methodological experts will work with CRG editors to ensure all reviews published both in CDSR and the journal are of acceptable quality. The initiative will start in early 2007 by training CRGs in the methodology and editorial processes, until which time CRGs should not be registering titles. ♦

### Cochrane communication channels

These are a number of targeted communication channels, including e-mail lists, newsletters and bulletins. Details can be found on the Cochrane website, at <http://www.cochrane.org/newslett/index.htm>.

### Feedback on this bulletin

If you would care to comment on either the content or format of this bulletin, please take the short survey at <http://tinyurl.com/vsh9j>. ♦