

Cochrane Oral Health Group



INFORMATION SHEET: **CONSUMER PEER REVIEWING STEP-BY-STEP**

Getting started: Experienced consumer reviewers may develop their own approach to looking at reviews but if you are just getting started these tips may help.

Step 1: Gather your own ideas

To begin, you might try reading only the title of the review, and jot down your own ideas about the topic. You may prefer to flick through to get a general idea of the whole document first. Whichever method you prefer, notice what thoughts and questions you have. Try to think creatively.

Step 2: Thinking about the review

Read the report carefully and consider it in the light of your own experience and expertise. Notice how you react as you read through the report. Are there some sections that you particularly like or particularly don't like? Can you explain how and why you think this? Try to use your own experience, think about choice and ethics, think logically and look for clear communication.

Step 3: Ordering your thoughts

Look back at the notes you made in step 1. Are all the questions that arose from your initial thinking answered? Might you suggest changes in how the research is done or how it is reported? Look at the notes you made in step 2. Would your suggestions allow the authors to keep those sections you liked and change the sections you did not like?

The Group will provide you with a checklist. Try using it after you have had ideas of your own - this may help you see if there is anything else you could think about. You may like to read through the review again in light of the checklist. But reading the checklist first may restrict your thinking and stifle your imagination.

Step 4: Making your comments

Using the checklist provided for feedback will help the editors and authors. But some forms do not help collate the ideas that commentators have, and you may wish to write more freely.

Encourage the authors - give positive feedback first and give it even if the standard checklist you are invited to use doesn't request positive feedback.

List your suggested changes. Explain why you recommend doing it differently and how important it is. List who might find the findings from this work useful and in what circumstances. You might like to work together with other people or you might like to work alone.

You may wish to send a copy of the review back to the Review Group with your comments written on it. Don't worry if you would like to rewrite them or tidy them up first - just ask your Review Group Co-ordinator to send you a new copy.

Each experience of refereeing a review is a learning experience and, if you get involved, we hope you will enjoy it.