

INFORMATION SHEET

Contributing to the journal handsearching programme for the Cochrane Oral Health Group and the worldwide journal handsearching programme

What is the Cochrane worldwide journal handsearching programme?

It is a programme set up to identify all published Controlled Clinical Trials worldwide by handsearching the literature page by page. The programme is highly co-ordinated to ensure that each journal is handsearched only once thereby avoiding duplication of effort and maximising resources. The resulting citations are then submitted to a database (CENTRAL) in *The Cochrane Library* for common access across the world.

Why is handsearching necessary?

The Cochrane Collaboration is dedicated to producing Systematic Reviews of the effects of healthcare interventions to help people make well-informed decisions about health care. A comprehensive search for all relevant trials is paramount to the quality of Systematic Reviews.

But can't trials be found through electronic searching?

Electronic searching will only pick up records in which the subject and study design information is given in either the title, abstract or keywords assigned to the paper. Many citations do not have abstracts – leaving only the title - publication type - and keywords to be searched electronically. In many papers the study design is only described in the main body of the paper – usually under the *materials & methods* section. Consequently many trials will be missed during an electronic search and research has shown that up to 50% of trials may be missed in this way¹. (Dickersin et al, 1994).

What does handsearching entail?

Each Review Group is responsible for co-ordinating handsearching of journals related to the Group's specialist subject. The Oral Health Group (OHG) manages searches from the dental/oral health literature. Handsearching requires the searcher to read/scan a journal page by page to identify published controlled clinical trials or information on trials, such as abstracts; correspondence etc. The handsearcher then feeds the information back to the OHG's Trials Search Co-ordinator.

What happens to the information then?

The citations to trials are downloaded into the OHG's Trials Register and in turn this is up-loaded into the CENTRAL database in *The Cochrane Library* enabling the information to be shared across the world.

Who does the handsearching?

Anyone may volunteer to undertake handsearching and contribute to The Cochrane Collaboration's worldwide programme.

1. Dickersin K, Scherer R, Lefebvre C. Identifying relevant studies for systematic reviews. *BMJ* 1994; 309:1286-91.

What commitment of time is needed from handsearchers?

The commitment of time is entirely in the control of the handsearcher.

Is handsearching done on a voluntary basis?

The Oral Health Group has a small budget from which it pays a few handsearchers who search on a regular basis but most people take on handsearching for the group on a voluntary basis. Costs incurred for photocopying and postage etc. are of course reimbursed.

Is training provided?

Training is provided remotely from the Oral Health Group's Editorial Office. Intending handsearchers are provided with a copy of the Group's Handsearchers' Manual which gives an overview and guidance of what is required. The manual also identifies a test set of journals which the handsearcher searches and then submits the results of the test back to the editorial base for marking.

Where is the handsearching carried out?

Handsearching is carried out at the most convenient library facility for the searcher.

Which journals would I be asked to search?

Searchers are usually asked to search a specific journal in the oral health literature. Once the handsearcher has satisfied the quality control test, a block of journals is assigned and registered to the searcher by mutual agreement between the OHG's Trials Search Co-ordinator and the searcher.

How can I become a handsearcher and contribute to the worldwide programme?

Contact the Trials Search Co-ordinator – a.littlewood@manchester.ac.uk to establish your interest and obtain a free copy of the Handsearchers' Manual. Read the manual then carry out the test search (see above).

If you require any further information please contact:

Anne Littlewood

Trials Search Co-ordinator/Information Manager

Cochrane Oral Health Group

MANDEC

School of Dentistry, The University of Manchester

Higher Cambridge Street

MANCHESTER M15 6FH UK

Tel: +44 (0)161 275 7814

Fax: +44 (0)161 275 7815

www.ohg.cochrane.org

Email: a.littlewood@manchester.ac.uk

The Cochrane worldwide handsearching programme is co-ordinated and managed by the New England Cochrane Center, in the USA, which operates a strict protocol for registering searches to ensure that each journal is handsearched only once, thereby avoiding duplication of effort and maximising resources. Further information and the Master list of journals being searched can be accessed via the worldwide web at www.cochrane.us/masterlist.asp