

INFORMATION SHEET: WRITING A REVIEW

BACKGROUND

The primary task of The Cochrane Collaboration is to prepare, maintain, and disseminate systematic reviews of the effects of health care. The time taken to prepare valid reviews, and the intellectual effort involved, should not be underestimated. Undertaking a review is a substantial commitment, as once it has been written it will need continuous updating as new evidence emerges.

All systematic reviews written within The Cochrane Collaboration are of a fixed format. A software package, Review Manager (RevMan), has been designed to help authors in constructing reviews in the appropriate format, and to prepare files required to transfer reviews electronically to the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR). A manual (the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions), gives a detailed description of how to prepare and maintain systematic reviews. Once an edited review has been accepted for publication on CDSR, the principal author will automatically receive a free subscription to CDSR.

SCOPE OF THE COCHRANE ORAL HEALTH GROUP

All randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of oral health broadly conceived to include the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of oral, dental, and craniofacial diseases and disorders. Where RCTs are inappropriate, rather than unavailable, other levels of evidence may be considered for inclusion in a Cochrane review.

STAGES IN WRITING A REVIEW

Writing a systematic review for The Cochrane Collaboration usually consists of the following stages:

1. Registering a provisional title
2. Writing a protocol for the review
3. Writing the review.

1. Registering a title

Points you may wish to consider when choosing a topic for a review are: your own interests, the relevance of the topic to others and time constraints. If you choose an area where a large number of trials have been undertaken, you may find the review is very time-consuming. The Oral Health Group (OHG) encourages reviewers to collaborate with at least one other person. If you do not know of any person who is interested in collaborating on your topic, contact the Group Co-ordinator who maintains a database of collaborators and their interests. If you are unsure about which topic area to choose, the Group does produce a list of areas where trials have been identified.

Once you have decided on a provisional title for a review, please let the Group Co-ordinator know as soon as possible by completing the title registration form. All titles need to be formally registered with the relevant Review Group to prevent possible wasted time and duplication of effort if more than one person unknowingly embarks on the same review. Once you have registered a title you will be advised on obtaining the relevant software and manuals.

2. Writing a protocol

Once a reviewer has registered a title, the next stage is to write a protocol consisting of the following sections:

- Cover sheet (title, citation details and contact address)
- Introduction to the review
- Objectives
- Eligibility criteria
- Search strategy
- Methods of the review.

The protocol forms part of the final review and is written within the software package, Review Manager. Once completed, the protocol is submitted for editorial scrutiny by the editors of the Group and external referees to ensure that the final review is likely to be reliable and practical. Once editorial approval has been granted, the protocol is published in CDSR. The protocol is normally expected within 6-9 months of registering a title.

3. Writing a review

Once the protocol has been written and edited, the final stage of writing a review consists of the following sections:

- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions.

The review is normally expected to be completed within 18 months of registering a title. As with the protocol, the review has to undergo editorial scrutiny before being acceptable for publication in CDSR.

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

As described previously the three stages in writing a review are as follows: submitting a title, writing a protocol and writing a review. In order that both reviewers and the editorial team are aware of their responsibilities and expected timescales, guidelines for both reviewers and the editorial team have been drawn up. A detailed information sheet *Cochrane Oral Health Group Editorial Process* is available from the Group Co-ordinator.

The time-scales given below may vary in line with the complexity of the review and personal time commitments.

The Reviewer	Time-scale after submission of title	The Editorial Team	Editorial turn-round time
1. Submit a title	-	Check for duplicate title; advise reviewer of acceptance; record on a database.	2 weeks
2. Submit a protocol	6-9 months	Editorial review by all editors and a minimum of two external referees. Return to reviewer for editing prior to submission to CDSR.	4-6 weeks
3. Submit a review	12-18 months	Scrutiny and editing as for a protocol prior to submission to CDSR.	6-8 weeks + 2 weeks for amendments

SUPPORT FOR REVIEWERS FROM THE EDITORIAL BASE

The editorial base in Manchester can provide support for reviewers in the following ways:

- Advice and support from the Co-ordinator or other members of the team
- Software and manuals for writing the review
- A database of randomised controlled trials
- An open invitation to visit the editorial base for more focused help and advice
- Contact details for other collaborators
- Statistical assistance.

Oral Health Trials Database

The editorial base maintains a database of controlled trials related to the scope* of the group (*see above). The database is updated on a daily basis from electronic searching and from the results of handsearching journals which identifies trials that may not get picked up by electronic searches due to the limited amount of information contained in the electronic record. Handsearching also identifies correspondence relating to trials and published and unpublished trials from conference proceedings and abstracts, much of which is not published in the electronic media.

Currently containing 18,000 records, the OHG Trials Register provides a valuable starting point for reviewers' literature searches.

The register is maintained and managed by the Oral Health Group's Trials Search Co-ordinator (TSC) who undertakes searches of the database for reviewers and is also available to assist reviewers in developing their search strategies for searching this and other databases.

SUPPORT FOR REVIEWERS FROM COCHRANE CENTRES

Cochrane Centres provide assistance to reviewers by organising workshops on developing a protocol, and writing a review. There is no charge for the workshops, but participants must cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. If you would like to find out more about dates and venues for the workshops please contact the Group Co-ordinator.

PUBLICATIONS

A Cochrane review is an electronic publication and a citable quality reference. In the UK the Higher Education Funding Councils recognises Cochrane reviews as quality criteria for the research assessment exercise for university departments. Publication within *The Cochrane Library* does not preclude reviews from publication in other journals. (Further details on this may be obtained from the information sheet *Publication of Cochrane Reviews in print journals and books* available from the Group Co-ordinator.)

If you require any further information, or wish to submit a title for a review, please contact:

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