

Module 2: Introduction to the Cochrane Collaboration

Learning objectives

- Be familiar with the history, aims and structure of the Cochrane Collaboration
- Be familiar with the types of questions addressed by Cochrane reviews
- Be in contact with the appropriate Cochrane Collaborative Review group

Relevant sections of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*

- Chapter 1: Introduction

Other relevant material

Cochrane Collaboration website (www.cochrane.org)
Cochrane Collaboration Introductory leaflets, available at (<http://www.cochrane.org/resources/leaflet.htm>)

In the previous module, we discussed something of the need for systematic reviews. In this module we'll look at what has been done to meet this need, and in particular we'll find out something about the Cochrane Collaboration.

The Cochrane Collaboration

This international organization has evolved in response to the need for systematic reviews. It exists with the aim of preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of health care interventions.

Most importantly, the Cochrane Collaboration is a network of people – individuals, not institutions. Its success or failure depends on these individuals. Most are working voluntarily on this project in a spirit of collaboration.

It's also important to note that the Cochrane Collaboration has limited its remit to reviews of the effects of health care interventions and the accuracy of diagnostic tests, so it is not attempting to address questions about the causes or the natural history of disease.



Now read the Cochrane Collaboration Introductory leaflets
(<http://www.cochrane.org/resources/leaflet.htm>)

For more information about the history, structure and objectives of the Cochrane Collaboration, read the Cochrane Collaboration Introductory leaflets.

The Cochrane Collaboration today

The Cochrane Collaboration has grown rapidly since its launch in 1993. There are now 13 Cochrane Centres around the world, and 52 Cochrane Review Groups (CRG) which cover most areas of health care. The infrastructure to accomplish the Collaboration's mission is now pretty much in place.

Currently about 300 new Cochrane reviews are being published each year

Currently, new reviews are being published on *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* at the rate of about 300 each year. Although this is good, there are plenty more reviews left to do, and we need to make sure the quality remains high and continues to improve over the coming years.

You can find up to date information about the Cochrane Collaboration at www.cochrane.org, and also on *The Cochrane Library* (www.thecochranelibrary.org). This is a quarterly electronic publication, containing a wealth of information about the effects of health care interventions. Now would be a good time to have a look at the Cochrane Collaboration website and find out how to access *The Cochrane Library*.



Find out how to access *The Cochrane Library* – click [here](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/mrwhome/106568753/AccessCochraneLibrary.html) for details (<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/mrwhome/106568753/AccessCochraneLibrary.html>). The first time you use it, look at the section 'Help! New Users Start Here' on the main screen. If you have internet access, explore the [Cochrane Collaboration website](http://www.cochrane.org) (www.cochrane.org).

Now complete the Activity on the left.

Finding your way round the Cochrane Collaboration

In the Cochrane Collaboration Brochure, you read something of the structure of the organisation. At first, the structure can be a bit daunting. This is because the task of co-ordinating an international effort like this is complicated, as you can imagine.

People preparing reviews as part of the Cochrane Collaboration are linked to a Cochrane Review Group, which covers the health problem of interest. For example, if you're interested in an intervention for people with strokes, you would work with the Cochrane Stroke Group, based in Edinburgh, UK.

So the first step is for you to decide what topics interest you. When you have thought this through, and decided that you really want to work in a particular area, there are two ways to find out which review group you need to talk to. The first is to contact your local Cochrane Centre and discuss it with the staff there. They will be able to put you in touch with review groups, but will not be able to help you decide what you are interested in.

The other way is to look through the list of review groups, either at the website (follow the links 'About us' and 'Review Groups & Centres') or by looking at *The Cochrane Library* (in the top part of the main screen, click on 'About Cochrane' and then click 'More' at the end of the paragraph under 'Cochrane Groups' to find an alphabetical list of groups with information about each).



Write down the health problems you are interested in

Then either look for your topic in the list of [groups](http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/cochrane_clsyr_srev_crglist_fs.html) (http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/cochrane_clsyr_srev_crglist_fs.html) on *The Cochrane Library* or discuss your interest with your local [Cochrane Centre](http://www.cochrane.org/contact/country.htm) (<http://www.cochrane.org/contact/country.htm>)

If it is not obvious which review group your topic will belong to, your local Cochrane Centre will help, or you can search for words on *The Cochrane Library* and see which groups are identified in your search. Look at the Cochrane Collaboration website to find your local Cochrane Centre (<http://www.cochrane.org/contact/country.htm>). This provides a list of reference Centres for each country and can be found via the Cochrane Collaboration website by clicking on 'About us' and then on 'Review Groups & Centres' and clicking on 'Contact your nearest Cochrane Centre'. Every country is linked to a Cochrane Centre and you can look to see which Centre is the reference Centre for your country.

You'll need to get in touch with the appropriate review group who will check how your interests might overlap with other work in the group, to make sure that you aren't planning work that has already been done. There is usually a bit of discussion about exactly what the topic you want to take on will be, what help you might need, and what help the group can offer you.

What if I don't have access to *The Cochrane Library*?

Why not ask your local library to arrange access? Tell them to go to *The Cochrane Library* and click on 'Access to Cochrane' at the top of the main page to find out how to do it. But if you don't have access to *The Cochrane Library*, either your review group or your local Cochrane Centre will help you find your way round the Cochrane Collaboration.

Further exploration of *The Cochrane Library* (optional)

If you do have access to *The Cochrane Library*, here are some more things to try.

- If you are interested in how reviews are done, and research about ways to improve reviews, have a look through the list of Methods Groups – groups of people who are interested in particular methodological questions. Do any seem relevant to your interests? If so, you might like to consider joining one.
- Look at the list of Fields. These were explained in the Cochrane Collaboration Introductory leaflets. Is there a Field in which you are interested?
- Finally, have a look at the reviews on the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. Find a review that is of interest to you, either by scrolling through the list of titles or doing a Search. Have a read of the review (printing it out if you prefer), and ask yourself the same things you did when reading a review in module 1 – how relevant is this review, how well does it summarise the evidence, and how could I do it better? Make some notes so that you can return to them later on, after completing the modules.