

## **Module 4: Planning a review, format of Cochrane reviews, and an introduction to RevMan**

In this module we'll think about all the resources you'll need to do a Cochrane review, and introduce you to the structure of a review and the Review Manager software (RevMan).

### **Learning objectives**

- Be aware of resource requirements for a review
- Be familiar with the structure of a Cochrane review
- Have loaded RevMan on a computer and be familiar with the tree structure of a review

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

- Chapter 2: Preparing a Cochrane review
- Chapter 4: Guide to the contents of a Cochrane protocol and review

### **Other relevant material**

- RevMan Tutorial
- RevMan User Guide



Read  
Chapter 2 of  
the  
Cochrane  
Handbook  
for  
Systematic  
Reviews of  
Interventions

The information contained in this Module relates to Chapter 2 of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*, which you should read now.

### **Planning your review**

When thinking about getting on with your review, it is a good idea to be aware of what resources you will need to complete the job. In the next module we'll think a little bit more about how you can use the protocol for your review to do some detailed planning. In this module, we'll look at the resources you're likely to need to complete a systematic review, what a Cochrane systematic review looks like, and get you using RevMan.

### **Resources for a review**

You'll need a range of knowledge and skills to complete a systematic review, and it pays to think about where you'll get these early on in the review process.

Here's a list of the sort of resources you'll need:

- somebody to do the work
- somebody to get the money
- somebody who is willing to write the review
- an information specialist (a librarian, or someone with in-depth knowledge of how to locate and retrieve studies)
- a methodologist
- content expertise – people who know about the condition from both the clinical and the consumer perspective

Don't panic if you don't meet all these criteria yourself! It's unusual to find all the knowledge, skills and resources required in one person. A systematic review is best prepared by a team of people rather than one individual, and some of these needs could be met by having an advisory group to give you input at intervals. Let's have a look at these criteria in turn.

It may sound obvious, but there is quite a bit of work involved in a systematic review – make sure someone in your team has the time to do this. Problems finding the time are one of the common reasons reviews don't progress quickly.

You don't have to pay anyone to do a Cochrane review, but you will need some money to do a systematic review, if only for postage, access to the internet, paying for library costs, etc. Someone will need to have this, or go and get it from somewhere.

It helps to have someone involved who enjoys writing and is good at it. This often means your review won't need as many revisions, and the results of your review will be communicated more clearly and effectively.

Advice from an information specialist is invaluable, so look into that. You may need help from someone experienced in the methods of reviews. If you're not very familiar with the subject matter of the review, you'll need some input from someone who knows about it (a content expert). Content experts can be clinicians who know a lot about the topic, or consumers who have personal experience of the condition. It's helpful to have input from both.

Finally, it helps to have someone or a group of people to check on your progress – an advisory group. This can be an efficient way of getting help from some of the experts you'll be approaching.

The Cochrane review group with which you are preparing the review will be able to provide some help in the last four categories. Many groups have a Trials Search Co-ordinator, each group should have access to the help of a statistician and be able to suggest people with other types of methodological expertise, and they may be able to help you find a content expert. The editorial team can act, to some extent, like an advisory group.



Make a note of how you plan to cover each of these categories. If you are preparing this review with a Cochrane group, find out what help they are able to offer.

*Activity:  
Make a list  
of the  
people  
involved in  
your review,  
what each of  
you brings to  
the process,  
and think  
how you  
plan to meet  
any  
remaining  
needs*



### **Allowing enough time for your review**

How long will your review take? As described in section 2.3.8 (Resources for a systematic review) of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*, this will vary depending on the content of the review, the time you have to devote to it and your skills. There are also busy times in a review, and quieter times, for instance when you're waiting to hear back from authors of studies. Box 2.3b contains a time scale that you could adapt to suit your own circumstances.

*Read  
Section  
2.3.8 of the  
Cochrane  
Handbook for  
Systematic  
Reviews of  
Interventions*

## Format of a Cochrane review



The format of a Cochrane review was devised so that it is flexible enough to accommodate reviews in topics across the whole of health care. It was also designed to give a degree of consistency across reviews, so that readers of reviews can find the same information in the same place in different reviews.

Read  
Chapter 4 of  
the  
Cochrane  
Handbook  
for  
Systematic  
Reviews of  
Interventions  
for a brief  
guide to the  
format of a  
Cochrane  
review

Chapter 4 of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* contains a guide to what goes in each section of a Cochrane review.

### Getting started with RevMan

Review Manager, RevMan for short, is the software developed within the Cochrane Collaboration for preparing reviews in a structured way, so that they can then be put together as *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*.

This software has been developed over a number of years. The current version is RevMan 5 which is available for Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems.

To get RevMan, there are several options. The website will always have the most up-to-date version of the software:

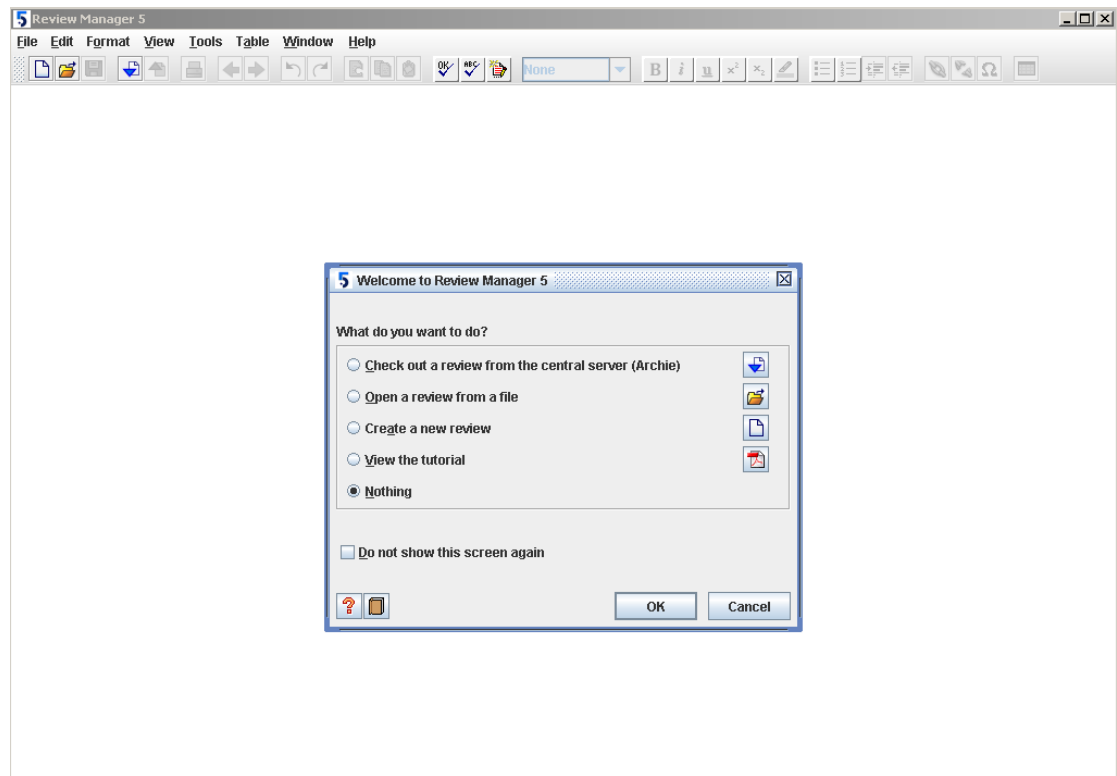
- visit the RevMan page (<http://www.cc-ims.net/revman>). There you'll find instructions on downloading and installing the software
- if you get the software on CD from you review group or elsewhere, look for a setup file on the CD and run it

Before you can start to work on your review in RevMan 5, you will need a user account to access Archie (this is the Cochrane Collaboration's central server where all reviews are stored). Your review group will set up an Archie user account for you when you become registered as a Cochrane review author.



Activity:  
Cochrane  
reviewers  
will need to  
get an  
Archie user  
account  
from their  
review group

Once you've installed the software and opened the program, you should be at the front page of RevMan, looking something like this:



A good way to orientate yourself is to press the question mark button at the bottom of the welcome box, which will tell you about the main window, and some of the features of RevMan. If you're familiar with Windows, most of this will be fairly familiar.

## RevMan Tutorial

Different people like learning software in different ways. Some people like to get to know the whole package in one go, and others prefer to learn it as they're using it.

A self-directed tutorial is available via the welcome box or the Help menu of RevMan 5. It consists of a pdf document and some files to use in RevMan.

*Start the RevMan Tutorial to familiarise yourself with the program*

Use this tutorial however you want – it takes about 3 hours to do the whole tutorial, which will explore most features of the program. You may wish, instead, just to do bits of the tutorial as you work through the modules.