



## The Cochrane Collaboration

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### What is the Cochrane Collaboration?

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international consortium of health care researchers and professionals dedicated to preparing, maintaining and disseminating reviews on the effectiveness of health care interventions. The major aim of the Collaboration is to improve the link between sound evidence and health care policy and practice.

The Cochrane Collaboration is named after Archie Cochrane (1909–1988), a British epidemiologist and one of the world's pioneer health care researchers. Cochrane recognized that systematic summaries of the findings from health care trials were essential if effective care was ever to be equitably distributed in times of constrained health resources. At present, there are over 500,000 published controlled trials of health care interventions, with over 15,000 published per year since 1990. The Cochrane Collaboration is the first systematic program to try to harness this valuable information, and is currently operated through nine Cochrane Centres worldwide: Australasian; Baltimore (US); Canadian; Dutch; Italian; Nordic; San Antonio (US); San Francisco (US); and the UK.

### What does the Cochrane Collaboration do?

There are three basic levels of involvement in the Cochrane Collaboration. The first is to systematically hand-search the world-wide health care literature to find controlled clinical trials. While computerised databases are useful adjuncts in a search process, only hand-searches will thoroughly uncover the many clinical trials available in the non-indexed or inappropriately-

indexed literature. When clinical trials are uncovered, they are sent to a central registry of clinical trials at the Baltimore Cochrane Center. This Center is in negotiations with the National Library of Medicine to have this accessible on their online database MEDLINE. Hand-searching is often, although not exclusively, organized by Fields. Cochrane Fields are internationally representative groups of researchers and practitioners, who register themselves and their interest with the Cochrane Collaboration. Fields are frequently organized by category of health care intervention (for example: surgery or complementary medicine), or by health service users (for example: children or the elderly). Individuals contributing to a Field identify studies relevant to their Field, promote the Field's perspectives within and across Collaborative Review Groups, and compile specialized databases of reviews to meet the needs of people in the Field.

A second level of involvement is through Collaborative Review Groups. The Collaborative Review Groups are made up of individuals who conduct the systematic overviews. Reviewers are usually experts in a health care discipline, typically a health professional with additional applied research training. Reviewers systematically summarize all the relevant health care trials of interventions for a specific clinical or health care problem, and keep this summary up to date on a regular basis. Each Collaborative Review Group has an Editorial Board, responsible for organization and peer-review within the Group. Once the review is accepted, it becomes part of the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, which is available on diskette through the BMJ Publishing Group. Negotiations are in progress to soon have this Database accessible on the Internet.

The third level of involvement in the Cochrane Collaboration is in the dissemination of the results of the reviews. While Fields and Collaborative Review Groups will by their very nature contribute to this, the Cochrane Consumer Network has been created to deal primarily with issues of dissemination. Individuals in the Consumer Network create avenues of dissemination for

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consumers, policy-makers, and clinicians, and also provide advice on potential funding sources and sponsorship.

The Cochrane Collaboration holds a Colloquium once per year, the third having recently been held in Oslo, Norway, sponsored by the Nordic Cochrane Centre. This Colloquium allows for an exchange of information and ideas with respect to systematic overviews and hand-searches. Among other events, the Colloquium runs practical workshops for Collaboration participants and plenary presentations of research advances into the science of systematic overviews and meta-analysis.

#### **Where does Chiropractic fit into the Cochrane Collaboration?**

Chiropractors are but one of many health care providers world-wide. Although we often share literature (from both a reader's and a writer's perspective) with other health care disciplines, chiropractic has its own unique body of literature which for completeness in the global Cochrane Collaboration effort needs to be hand-searched. Efforts are currently underway to hand-search these journals through volunteers at various chiropractic colleges world-wide. As well, chiropractors are involved in both Fields and Collaborative Review Groups.

#### **How to find out more about the Cochrane Collaboration in Canada?**

There are a number of ways to find out more about the Cochrane Collaboration. On the Internet, gopher services are available to the Cochrane Collaboration which allow access to information about news, documents, programs, manuals and archives.

The gopher server at the Health Information Research Unit at McMaster University can be accessed through:

gopher address: [hiru.mcmaster.ca](gopher://hiru.mcmaster.ca)  
administrator: [haywardr@fhs.mcmaster.ca](mailto:haywardr@fhs.mcmaster.ca)

#### **On the World Wide Web:**

access to the Cochrane home page:  
URL address: <http://hiru.mcmaster.ca>  
to view the gopher pages:  
URL address: <gopher://hiru.mcmaster.ca>

Or, if you have not upgraded to surf the net, you can still make contact the usual way:

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