

Branch of the Cochrane Collaboration founded in Croatia

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Introduction

In 2006 a small group of enthusiasts from the University of Split School of Medicine and Croatian Medical Journal were gathered around the ideas promoted by The Cochrane Collaboration. They saw the establishing of the Croatian Cochrane entity as an opportunity for enhancing medical

At the end of 2006 the Croatian Medical Journal and the University of Split School of Medicine started a campaign to establish a Croatian entity of The Cochrane Collaboration. The reasons for founding a Cochrane entity in Croatia were the advancement of evidence-based medicine and multifold education of Croatian health care workers about The Cochrane Library and its importance for medicine. In 2008 the Croatian Branch of the Italian Cochrane Center was founded with the purpose of promoting evidence-based medicine, The Cochrane Collaboration and *The Cochrane Library* in Croatia, and to encourage Croatian healthcare workers to become authors of Cochrane systematic reviews. The Cochrane Collaboration prepares, maintains and promotes systematic reviews for the benefit of clinical medical practice. *The Cochrane Library* is a result of international effort, mostly based on the work of thousands of volunteers and the very few professional staff employed at Cochrane entities. Likewise, the Croatian Branch of the Italian Cochrane Center relies mostly on the volunteer work of multiple collaborators and has very few staff members in the central office. With the foundation of the Cochrane entity in Croatia, the evidence-based medicine movement in the whole region should be enhanced.

Key words: Systematic reviews, The Cochrane Collaboration, The Cochrane Library,

practice and introducing Croatian healthcare workers to The Cochrane Library, as an important source of information for clinical decisions. As a result of their efforts and two-year preparations, the Croatian branch of the Italian Cochrane center (CBICC) was established in 2008. It immediately became an invaluable contribution to the evidence-based medicine (EBM) movement in Croa-

tia. CBICC is now one of the 26 international centers of The Cochrane collaboration.

The Cochrane Collaboration

The Cochrane collaboration is a unique, worldwide, non-profit organization that aims to help people make well-informed decisions about all forms of health care by preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of health care interventions (1).

A systematic review is a literature review focused on a single question, that tries to identify, appraise, select and synthesize all high quality research evidence relevant to that question. Systematic reviews of high-quality randomized controlled trials are crucial to evidence-based medicine. An understanding of systematic reviews and how to implement them in practice is becoming mandatory for all professionals involved in the delivery of health care. Systematic review may contain meta-analysis, a statistical method that combines results of several different studies, but there are also systematic reviews where meta analysis is not appropriate for various reasons (2).

Since systematic reviews are based on demanding methodology and they can be of variable quality and quickly become out of date, The Cochrane Collaboration is addressing all these issues by avoiding duplication, encouraging authors to update their reviews, promoting its resources and providing support to review authors.

The Cochrane collaboration was founded in 1993 and named after the British epidemiologist, Archie Cochrane. The members of The Cochrane Collaboration are organized into groups, known as 'entities', which include groups of health care workers, as well as groups of patients (3). Data from The Cochrane Library in 2004 show that there were more than 11,500 people working within The Cochrane Collabora-

tion in over 90 countries, half of whom are authors of Cochrane Reviews. The number of Cochrane authors and collaborators has increased by about 20% every year for the last five years (3).

The Cochrane Library

The main product of The Cochrane collaboration is *The Cochrane Library*.

It is a collection of databases that contain high-quality, independent evidence to inform healthcare decision-making. Cochrane systematic reviews represent the highest level of evidence on which to base clinical treatment decisions. The Cochrane Library has multiple resources, among which the most popular and most used is the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. Currently *The Cochrane Library* comprises 3916 complete reviews and 1905 protocols (4). Other than systematic reviews, The Cochrane Library provides other sources of reliable information: other systematic reviews abstracts, technology assessments, economic evaluations, and individual clinical trials – all the current evidence in one single environment (4).

The Cochrane Library is published by John Wiley and Sons Ltd., a commercial publisher. In this way The Cochrane Collaboration does not need to spend its scarce resources and staff on the process of publishing and advertising the reviews, and royalties that are earned through subscriptions are shared between publisher and The Cochrane Collaboration. On the other hand, the commercial publisher charges for the use of The Cochrane Library, so healthcare workers and users need to have either an institutional or a personal subscription. Multiple countries have purchased nationwide provision, which means that every computer in that country can access The Cochrane Library. Also, Wiley provides *Cochrane Library* access free-of-charge to the poorest countries. Third-party funds for ac-

cessing The Cochrane Library are limited to non-pharmaceutical sources of funding to prevent conflicts of interest.

The Croatian Branch of the Italian Cochrane Center and its business plan

The main goal of CBICC is knowledge translation, including continuing education and dissemination of information about available research evidence. Therefore, the First Croatian Cochrane Symposium was organized on June 27, 2009 at the University of Split School of Medicine. The Symposium was attended by people from Croatia but also by people from surrounding Eastern countries, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participants were acquainted with the work of The Cochrane Collaboration and more specifically, the work of the CBICC and obtained other valuable information on how to use and possibly even publish in *The Cochrane Library*. Other CBICC activities include preparing free online continuous education courses about the preparation and maintenance of a Cochrane systematic review in the Croatian language, that will be available to Croatian healthcare workers, and for which they will be able to obtain continuous education credits from their respective professional associations. The CBICC would like to provide education about The Cochrane Collaboration and *The Cochrane Library* in the Croatian language to motivate Croatian healthcare workers and users to engage actively in evidence-based medicine by using its principles and creating the best evidence.

The CBICC has many more ambitious goals, for instance: securing funds for temporary scholarships that will provide full-time opportunities for creating systematic reviews; lobbying for nationwide access and establishing a Cochrane Review group in Croatia. But, to begin with, more effort is needed to raise awareness that The Co-

chrane Library exists, that it is available to biomedical consortia and that Croatian healthcare workers can become part of it. The past decades have seen The Cochrane Collaboration develop into a mature and internationally recognized organization that meets its goals (5). This is what CBICC hopes to accomplish.

Publishing a Cochrane systematic review

In order to write a Cochrane systematic review, the first step is to browse The Cochrane Library and to check whether a systematic review, protocol or title that are identical or similar to the chosen subject has already been published. If there is no such review, it is necessary to determine which Cochrane Review Group his or her area of interest belongs to. The next step is contacting the Review Group and suggesting a title for the review. To avoid duplication of effort within The Cochrane Collaboration, one title belongs to only one author or group of authors. Once the title is accepted, nobody else will be permitted to prepare a Cochrane systematic review with the same topic. After the title has been submitted, the Review group expects the author(s) to submit a protocol within 6 months. A protocol consists of an introduction - description of background knowledge about the subject, and a description of the methods that will be used, including details about search strategy, keywords for searching literature and databases that will be searched. When the protocol is submitted, the Review group evaluates it and then sends it to two peer-reviewers and sends feedback to authors. The protocol, when completed, is published in The Cochrane Library and then the authors may start to review literature based on the protocol and to prepare a full systematic review. Usually it takes up to 24 months for authors to prepare a review after the protocol is accepted.

The Cochrane Library is an international publication indexed in Current Contents and its impact factor for year 2008 is 5.1. This high impact factor serves not only as confirmation of the quality of a Cochrane publication, but also as a publication that can be used for academic advancement in Croatia. Preparation of a systematic review using the Cochrane methodology is challenging, but it is important to keep in mind that a Cochrane systematic review will be accepted for publication after it is completed, because a Cochrane Review Group helps the author(s) to prepare it and it is in their interest to have the review published. In other journals, the author sends completed manuscripts and can only hope that the manuscript will not be rejected.

In conclusion, The Cochrane Collaboration is an exciting organization. The CBICC has many plans for the future and would be

happy to include neighboring countries in its activities. All potential authors, volunteers and organizations interested in Cochrane work are welcome to contact the CBICC to arrange future collaboration.

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