

# Nordic Cochrane News

Newsletter for The Nordic Cochrane Centre (NCC)



Issue 12, December 2007



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Front cover illustration by Jacob Riis,  
The NCC

## Disastrous consequences of restricted access to *The Cochrane Library* in Denmark

Half the world's population, about 3 billion people, currently have free access to *The Cochrane Library*. All citizens in Denmark also had free access from late 2004 to early 2007. However, when the contract with the publisher, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., was renewed, access was restricted to hospitals, universities and other institutions and organisations that contributed to the common pot.

It was believed that very few non-professionals used *The Cochrane Library*. This belief has proved to be wrong. The Nordic Cochrane Centre has received numerous complaints about the new arrangement from people who could not get access to *The Cochrane Library*. There have also been complaints addressed to leading health politicians and questions in the parliament, and the government has recently declared that it will finance full access to *The Cochrane Library*. Indeed, this is the only reasonable way forward, as full access for everyone will not be more costly for Denmark than seriously restricted access.

The limited access has had a dramatic impact on the usage of *The Cochrane Library*. According to data we have received from the publisher, the number of full-text access (pdf or html files) from April to October were:

	April-October	Change
2005	16,676	
2006	23,431	40.5%
2007	12,776	-45.5%

For comparison, the numbers for Norway for the whole period till October were:

	January-October	Change
2005	26,266	
2006	35,287	34.3%
2007	50,117	42.0%

The decision made in early 2007 that prevented the citizens of Denmark from having the same rights as doctors to use knowledge from healthcare research, has meant that nearly 8,000 attempts to access this knowledge have failed. That is equivalent to one person of every hour of 2007 asking a question about health care and being told that they cannot have the answer, because they do not belong to the right profession or work in the right hospital. It is even far worse than that because, not surprisingly, many people who get this type of answer to a question, will never ask again.

It is a fundamental asset of democratic countries that information that is important to the citizens is transparent and available. Few things are more important than having access to reliable information about the benefits and harms of interventions for preventing and treating diseases.

We are very pleased that there will soon again be free access for all Danes. And we hope that our experience will deter other countries from limiting access to *The Cochrane Library*.  
*Peter C. Gøtzsche, The NCC*

## Data extraction errors in meta-analyses

Researchers at the Nordic Cochrane Centre have looked at the reliability of 27 published meta-analyses (16 of which were Cochrane reviews) and found many data extraction errors. All meta-analyses had reported standardized mean differences (SMDs). The result could not be replicated for at least one of two randomly selected trials in 10 of the meta-analyses (37%). Common problems were erroneous number of patients, means, standard deviations, and sign for the effect estimate. When the data from all the trials in these 10 meta-analyses were checked, seven (70%) were erroneous. One of these meta-analyses was subsequently retracted, and in two, a significant difference disappeared or appeared, compared with the original authors' findings. The high proportion of meta-analyses based on SMDs that showed errors implies that all readers, including journal reviewers and policy makers, should approach such meta-analyses with caution. Editors should be particularly careful when editing SMD meta-analyses and should consider to check the extracted data. Reference: JAMA 2007;298:430-7.

*Peter C Gotzsche, The NCC*

## News from the software team

### A New RevMan

RevMan 5 is scheduled for release across the collaboration in March 2008, but is now being piloted by 5 Review Groups. You can read more about RevMan 5 in Cochrane News, Issue 41 and on the IMS website [www.cc-ims.net](http://www.cc-ims.net).

### Staff change

As of 1 January 2008, Greg Saunders has left the centre for new opportunities in Switzerland. Greg worked on the workflow (a.k.a. 'tracking') component of Archie, and has made great progress, which we look forward to building upon. We will miss Greg, but wish him all the best in his new job.

*Jacob Riis, The IMS Team*

## Publication dates - The Cochrane Library

Issue 1, 2008	23 January 2008
Issue 2, 2008	16 April 2008
Issue 3, 2008	9 July 2008

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## New staff at The NCC



### Margrethe Nielsen

PhD student, joined The Nordic Cochrane Centre on 1 June 2007.

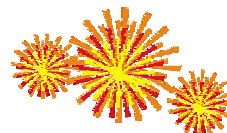


### Anders W. Jørgensen

PhD student, joined The Nordic Cochrane Centre on 1 May 2007.

## Workshops and meetings at the NCC in 2008

Date	Event
10 March	Protocol workshop
27 March	RevMan workshop
11 September	RevMan workshop
29 September	Protocol workshop
On demand	Individual sessions on writing protocols/reviews and using RevMan (Copenhagen and Oslo)



**The Nordic Cochrane Centre  
wishes you all  
A Happy New Year**