

# Nordic Cochrane News

*Newsletter for the Nordic Cochrane Centre (NCC)*



Issue 8, December 2003



Front cover illustration by Vasily Vlassov, Russian branch of the NCC

## No industry funding of Cochrane Reviews, please!

At the recent Cochrane Colloquium in Barcelona, a plenary session was devoted to conflicts of interest. The review groups based in the Nordic area and the Nordic Cochrane Centre are firmly against industry funding of Cochrane Reviews, whether fully or in part, as we believe such relationships with industry would destroy the credibility of Cochrane Reviews. The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry has previously declared that it would be inappropriate for individual companies to be associated in any way with the funding or sponsorship of the activities of any review group. There were many debates in Barcelona, also among the co-ordinating editors. The impression was that by far, most people were in favour of banning industry sponsorship of Cochrane Reviews, in

accordance with a survey we did in the autumn of 2002. The slides from the plenary talks on industry funding at the colloquium will soon be available together with videos of the talks at [www.colloquium.info](http://www.colloquium.info); my own slides from the plenary are available at [www.cochrane.dk/ncc/materials/Sponsorship-Barcelona2003.ppt](http://www.cochrane.dk/ncc/materials/Sponsorship-Barcelona2003.ppt). See also Ray Moynihan's articles in the BMJ on this issue ([www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com), Oct 18, Nov 1, Nov 8).

We hope you support our position and urge you to respond to the consultation document that the Steering Group will disseminate in December 2003.

*Peter C Gøtzsche, NCC*

## Funding and conclusions of drug trials

Previous studies have shown that conclusions in randomised trials are more positive toward experimental interventions if funded by for-profit organisations. The pharmaceutical industry has argued that this is not surprising since trials sponsored by for-profit entities have a much higher *a priori* probability of producing a positive outcome, and therefore a positive conclusion, than trials sponsored by nonprofit entities.

We designed a study to assess these claims (JAMA 2003;290:921-8). We analysed data from 370 drug trials identified in a random sample of meta-analyses published in the Cochrane Library.

We found no significant difference in treatment effect between trials funded by different sources, but trials funded by for-profit organisations reported significantly more adverse events in the experimental group. After adjusting for the treatment effect and double-blinding, conclusions of drug trials funded by for-profit organisations were five times as likely to recommend the experimental drug as the treatment of choice than conclusions of trials funded by nonprofit organisations. Likely explanations could be undue emphasis on results from surrogate outcomes, secondary outcome measure analyses, subgroup analyses or a biased interpretation of trial results.

*Bodil Als-Nielsen, Copenhagen Trial Unit*

## Cochrane Library for all in Denmark

The Cochrane Library became freely available to all Danish citizens in December 2003 with financial support from the Danish Regions, the Electronic Research Library, and the Knowledge and Research Centre for Alternative Medicine. We regard this as a large step forward. In a democratic society, essential knowledge should be freely available to all citizens, and it is important for people to know the benefits and harms of treatments and other healthcare interventions. When patients become more informed, so will their doctors. The nation-wide accessibility of Cochrane Reviews will therefore contribute to the continued medical education of doctors, making it more independent from industry that has a natural focus on drugs rather than alternative forms of treatment such as lifestyle changes. The Cochrane Library can be accessed from [www.sundhed.dk](http://www.sundhed.dk), [www.deff.dk](http://www.deff.dk), [www.vifab.dk](http://www.vifab.dk) and [www.cochrane.dk](http://www.cochrane.dk).

*Peter C Gøtzsche, NCC*

## New entity in Finland: Occupational Health Field

The formal exploratory meeting for the Occupational Health Field was held at the Cochrane Colloquium in Barcelona and the field is expected to become formally registered as a Cochrane entity soon. It is hosted at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH). Dr Jos Verbeek from Amsterdam University has started as field co-ordinator; the trials search co-ordinator is Merja Jauhiainen, an experienced information specialist from FIOH; and the position as field administrator is still open. Iris Pasternack will continue to guide the field through the registration process.

The first tasks will be to set up a specialised trials register and to facilitate the production of Cochrane Reviews on occupational health interventions. The production of a homepage for the field is another important task. We have offered to pilot the new uniform web page template for Cochrane entities elaborated by the German Cochrane Centre.

We welcome physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, epidemiologists, hygienists, psychologists and others active in occupational health settings to join our effort of building up an evidence base for interventions applied in occupational practices for modifying the disease, environment and behaviour of working people.

Contact Jos Verbeek ([jos.verbeek@ttl.fi](mailto:jos.verbeek@ttl.fi)) or Iris Pasternack ([iris.pasternack@stakes.fi](mailto:iris.pasternack@stakes.fi)).

*Iris Pasternack, Finnish Branch*

## Nordic web site on consumer involvement in the Cochrane Collaboration

A new web site aimed at improving consumer involvement in the Cochrane Collaboration is now available at [www.cochrane.no/consumers](http://www.cochrane.no/consumers).

Claire Glenton at the Norwegian branch of the Nordic Cochrane Centre has been responsible for its development and has collaborated closely with Janet Wale (Australia), Gill Gyte (UK), and Dell Horey (Australia). Existing information from sources both within and outside the Collaboration have been used when possible.

The aims of the web site are:

to provide consumers with advice and practical assistance in getting involved in the Cochrane Collaboration, including:

- information about the Collaboration and how it is organised

- description of what consumers can do and are already doing within the Collaboration
- interviews with Cochrane consumers

to provide Cochrane groups with advice and practical assistance in finding, recruiting and supporting consumers, including:

- addresses of consumer organisations
- examples of letters and information brochures that can be sent to consumers
- checklists for consumer peer reviewing

The web site was originally targeted at Nordic consumers as well as Cochrane groups wishing to recruit Nordic consumers. However, it is now being adapted for use by the Consumer Network and most of its contents will be presented on the main Cochrane Collaboration web site shortly.

*Claire Glenton, Norwegian branch*

### The patient as a consumer - with focus on patient information

On 22 October 2003, the Nordic Cochrane Centre and the Danish Consumer Council convened a conference with the title "The patient as a consumer - with focus on patient information."

The purpose of the conference was to discuss how to ensure access to reliable and updated information about the health services. Information is necessary to create a basis for informed choice, but there seems to be problems in the health care system today with the type of information offered on treatment alternatives, lifestyle changes, risks and harms. A number of stakeholders are involved in setting the framework for the information and they were gathered to discuss information to patients. What is information, how much information, what is informed choice, evidence based information, and information on other interventions than drugs, for example lifestyle changes, were some of the issues under debate.

*Margrethe Nielsen, Danish Consumer Council*

### Medical students and research

Seven medical students - two of which have recently become doctors - are actively involved in research at the Nordic Cochrane Centre. Elisabeth Forfang and Mette Haahr contribute substantially to two ongoing projects on blinding in randomised trials, and Mette Haahr also to a project that compares trial protocols with subsequent trial reports which was presented by An-Wen Chan at the XI Cochrane Colloquium in Barcelona.

The BMJ has accepted an article by Karsten Jørgensen about information on breast cancer screening on web sites, and a manuscript by Lasse Schmidt on reference bias in narrative review articles of the effect of interventions for house dust mites in patients with asthma has been submitted; both authors also presented their findings at the XI Cochrane Colloquium in Barcelona. Katrine Karmisholt has completed two manuscripts on the effect of physical training for primary and secondary prevention of disease by reviewing existing systematic reviews of single disease entities. The first manuscript has been submitted. Anne Due is doing a project on possible bias caused by the use of disease-specific rather than total mortality in cancer trials, and Anders Jørgensen is comparing the quality of Cochrane Reviews with industry-sponsored systematic reviews.

*Ashbjørn Hróbjartsson, NCC*

### Draft guidelines for use of non-randomised studies

The methods group on non-randomised studies has produced draft guideline chapters that are available on the homepage of the Nordic Cochrane Centre, [www.cochrane.dk](http://www.cochrane.dk). The plan is that the overall editing and harmonisation of the various chapters will be ready in April 2004 and finalised after peer review in June 2004. A particularly good thing about the methods group is that it represents a diverse range of people and backgrounds. There was a broad range of opinions when the work started in the group, but as work proceeded, good agreement was reached on the central issues. One important reason for this is that any arguments or opinions should be supported by good empirical evidence in order to gain general support. Since the guidelines will be firmly evidence-based, they are expected to have substantial impact when published, both within and outside the Cochrane Collaboration. The group has received generous funding from the Danish Centre for Evaluation and Health Technology Assessment; its convenor is Barney Reeves, London.

*Peter C Gøtzsche, NCC*

***How to become involved in the  
Cochrane Collaboration?  
See [www.cochrane.dk](http://www.cochrane.dk)***

## Editing workshop

In October, the Nordic Cochrane Centre hosted a two-day workshop related to the extensive editorial work carried out by the Cochrane review groups with an editorial office in Denmark: the Hepato-Biliary group, the Anaesthesia group and the Colorectal Cancer group. The discussions were based on the groups' published Cochrane protocols and systematic reviews. There were 20 participants from three continents. We focused particularly on the challenges of ensuring easy readability and a high quality of the protocols and reviews. The importance of the "comment and criticism" facility in the Cochrane Library was emphasised, and it was suggested that this facility should be displayed more clearly in the Cochrane Library interface and leave two options for the users. One is the current facility where the reader submits an electronic letter to the editor with comments of a technical or methodological nature which is published with the authors' response. The other type of comment would not be published but would serve as the readers' informal forum of open discussion with authors and editors. This would allow for more spontaneous comments on readability and other immediate impressions that might be helpful in improving the review when updated. We have subsequently suggested these changes to the San Francisco branch of the US Cochrane Center and John Wiley & Sons, the Cochrane Collaboration's publisher.

*Ashjorn Hróbjartsson, NCC*

## Stipends for Cochrane Reviews

Through collaboration with the Nordic Cochrane Centre, the Knowledge and Research Centre for Alternative Medicine have made stipends available for production of Cochrane Reviews in alternative medicine. The Knowledge Centre has provided some of its own funds and funds received from the Danish Cancer Society. Several Cochrane Reviews are in progress. It would be useful if other patient organisations would consider the possibility of offering stipends for Cochrane Reviews. It is, however, important to ensure that such funding cannot be linked to particular products, to avoid funding being channelled through a patient organisation from a company that wishes to have a Cochrane Review produced on its own product.

*Peter C Göttsche, NCC*

## New staff at the NCC

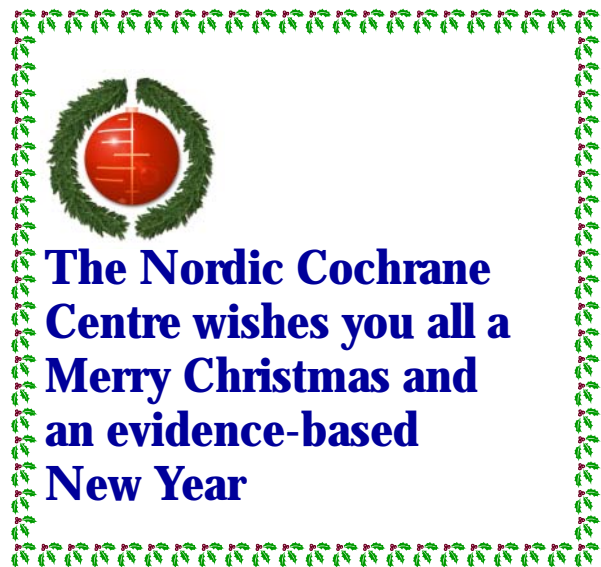


System Developer, Peter Friis, joined the IMS team on 1 August 2003.

## Workshops hosted by the NCC in 2004

Date	Event
19 April	Protocol workshop
25 October	Protocol workshop
1 - 2 June and 14 -15 June	Evidence-based medicine

*Details on [www.cochrane.dk](http://www.cochrane.dk)*



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