MINUTES
Cochrane Library Oversight Committee (first meeting)
2 November 2010 @ 13:30

Present:
- Richard Smith, UK, Chair
- David Tovey, UK, Editor-in-Chief, The Cochrane Library
- Lisa Bero, USA, Professor of Pharmacy, UCSF
- Godwin Busuttil, UK, English libel lawyer with experience not only of libel but also research and editorial misconduct
- Tracey Koehlmoos, Bangladesh, head of health systems and chronic disease research at ICDDR, B (formerly International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh)
- David Moher, Canada, clinical epidemiologist, methods expert
- Magne Nylenna, Norway, former editor of the Norwegian Medical Journal and head of the Norwegian National Library of Health
- Prem Pais, India, Professor of Medicine and Dean, St John’s Medical College, Bangalore

Apologies:
- Cindy Farquar, New Zealand, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Minutes:
- Hilary Simmonds, PA to David Tovey

Introductions
Richard introduced himself and asked for everybody present to briefly introduce themselves.

Richard confirmed that there had been a very good range of people offering to serve on the Cochrane Library Oversight Committee (CLOC) and all had been good applicants. He said it was key to
have a good mix and also to have non-Cochrane people on the Committee. He was very grateful to all for their time.

There is no plan to meet face to face at the moment. The next meeting will be by conference call in three months. **ACTION: Hilary to arrange.**

**Declarations of Interest**

Richard asked for any Declarations of Interest that may be an issue to the Committee.

David Moher confirmed that he is starting a Journal called ‘Systematic Reviews’ and wanted to raise this. Richard said that this was not a problem and David Tovey agreed. David Moher was selected for his personal attributes and there was no reason not to include him. Lisa Bero thought that there was no conflict of interest and did not foresee any issues.

**Remit of Committee**

The Remit of Committee was seen as something of an experiment and a work in progress. Richard confirmed that it was also to make a judgement on how *The Cochrane Library* and David and his team were progressing and also to offer a supportive role.

Theoretically the Committee should nominate a Deputy Chair and this will be arranged before the next meeting. Richard asked for any comments on the remit and all present were happy. **ACTION: to appoint Deputy Chair**

Godwin asked if the Committee was to resolve disputes? Richard Smith ran through a brief history of oversight committees and said that there could be disputes in the future and that the Oversight Committee will help to resolve any of those.

Prem asked what level of authority does the Oversight Committee have? Richard confirmed that it will provide a review of David Tovey and his team and will report to the Cochrane Collaboration (CC) Steering Group. Richard confirmed that the Oversight Committee could say publicly if it disagreed with the Steering Group. Godwin stated that we would have to be very careful about making public our views if they were critical of the CC Steering Group. Richard confirmed that Godwin’s expertise would be very valuable in judging this.

Lisa confirmed that the Steering Group was very supportive and positive of the new Cochrane Library Oversight Committee.

**Report from the Editor in Chief, David Tovey**

David Tovey then reported that currently there are no major or minor issues threatening Cochrane’s editorial independence. He has spent considerable time last year getting to know people. He has
formed a small team in London and has since, with his team, been working on a large number of projects.

- **Quality** – there was concern about high quality and consistency across the Review Groups and the Editorial Unit has been looking at editorial processes. They have recently started looking at review quality parameters and confirmed that there is room for reviews to be processed in a variable way.

  He also asked the Review Groups to do a self audit about 12 months ago and the CEU team compiled responses and fed these back within the Collaboration. As a consequence the CEU have been conducting ongoing meetings with the Review Groups to talk about processes and identified issues.

  Secondly, we have to agree minimum standards and in April David suggested setting up groups in six areas for minimum standards, fatal flaws and common errors. At the moment there is considerable variation in the interpretation of the handbook. There is no agreement across Cochrane as to what minimum standards are.

- **Impact** - measuring impact is more problematic. There are three years of impact factors (6.3 at the moment) up on the previous two years. Also looking at more meaningful measures such as usage, implementation and usage in guidelines and how we could measure those. For the first time this year we presented comparative impact factor data to Review Groups.

- **Updating reviews** – this is a major issue with currently 4,500 reviews and >50% of these "out of date". There is an on-going NHS funded project looking at updating reviews.

- The Editorial Unit is also looking at improving the presentation of Reviews via *The Cochrane Library* website. First step was to move to monthly from quarterly publication. A new home page has been launched incorporating Special Collections and Editorials which have been broadly successful. The next stage will involve improving the search functions and the way we display reviews although this has been waiting for Wiley to change the hosting platform from Wiley InterScience to Wiley Online Library.

- David is also looking at developing partnerships namely the NHS in the UK and WHO. There has been a large project with WHO which involved developing 12 Cochrane Reviews on Vitamin A Supplementation. This was a successful project with a small amount of revenue for Cochrane. We met recently with NICE and have been presented with a list of all topics they rate highly but have no resources to do guidelines on. We will analyse these topics and make sure the review groups know of them and they can perhaps prioritise them.

- The Editorial Unit’s relationship with the Steering Group is enormously supportive and feedback has been largely positive. The Co-Eds’ Executive is also positive and pushing to go
further in challenging Reviews Groups (particularly in relation to standards). David confirmed that we need to push a bit harder with Review Groups that do not meet acceptable standards although there is a resource issue in overseeing quality of 30 new reviews and 30 updated reviews per month with a small team.

David reports to the Steering Group, primarily the two Co-Chairs and he has clear objectives for each year. David also has his own objectives which he presents to the Steering Group.

There is no appraisal yet of Editor-in-Chief and no plans for one. David feels this should be addressed. Logically the Oversight Committee should agree Editorial Unit objectives for the year. The Oversight Committee should discuss both with and without David, and Richard could go through separately with David. David was very positive about that. The Steering Group may do this in addition.

David Moher suggested that it was most important for the Oversight Committee to feedback independently to David Tovey ‘which in turn will help to protect David Tovey’.

Richard confirmed again that the group are there to support the Editor-in-Chief but also accountable to the Steering Group. The Oversight Committee can also mediate if needed.

Magne said that it was most important to have freedom and it will also be hard to foresee issues. On one hand we should not duplicate work of the Steering Group but on other hand we should have an open agenda and mind.

Richard confirmed that we need maximum independence of the Cochrane Library Oversight Committee. He also confirmed that as the Oversight Committee was such a new entity for The Cochrane Collaboration perhaps its remit should be revisited from time to time and modification applied.

Godwin stated that it is desirable to have as much independence as possible, to offer a supporting role to David and his team and also at same time report to the Steering Group.

Richard Smith asked for any other comments and said that perhaps a written report from David Tovey would be good for the future.

**ACTION:** DT to provide a brief progress report for next meeting.

**Comment on The Cochrane Library**

Tracey K was asked to give a general comment and feedback on *The Cochrane Library*. There were no specifics. For low income countries, WHO sponsor a series of search engines to enable access and it is a great benefit to have access to the library in low income countries.

Prem stated that in India people have free access and that Cochrane has a number of reviewers in India but in general use of the Library is less than it could be. This all comes back to impact.

Magne confirmed that *The Cochrane Library* was available for any citizen in Norway. He stated that they do not know much about public or patient use but it is part of Norway’s open access policy for knowledge. He has no data on usage to hand.
David Moher stated that *The Cochrane Library* is the brand of Cochrane and he was not sure that the brand is promoted enough. In some ways we may learn from branding like Coca Cola. Canada does not have a site licence. We need open access – one click in Canada. David has to access the Library via his University. There is an issue that some reviews are too big. We need to build the library to be able to provide different outputs to different users - for example 3 pages summaries for policy makers. 60-80 page reviews are sometimes too long.

Lisa stated that the US does not have a general subscription although there are Institutional subscriptions. Only Australia is ahead of US on hits. Use of *The Cochrane Library* in the US has grown tremendously. It is well known in the US but it is a challenge to make the reviews more relevant to more users for different needs whilst also maintaining quality. Lisa also talked about the comparative effectiveness research programme in the US.

Godwin stated that through his work at the *BMJ* and as an outsider is clear that *The Cochrane Library* is regarded as the gold standard of evidence based medicine. This is also the view in the non-medical world.

Richard Smith confirmed that he does not always find it easy to search whatever it is he is looking for in *The Cochrane Library*. He also finds reviews that have not been updated for a very long time.

David Tovey said that he was very interesting range of views from the group. There are times when there are issues of relevance with the reviews and there are gaps. There are also views from some guidelines organisations that Cochrane Reviews sometimes do not focus on the issues that they are most interested in.

David Tovey feels that the website is not as hard to navigate as it was previously. Site navigation in general has been improved. Areas to work on include quality, particularly relevance and measure of quality, updating and the way it is presented. We should remember that reviewers are volunteers. Review Groups are increasing and we set very high entry requirements for new reviewers.

In conclusion, this is a marvellous resource but it could also be better.

**Proposed performance measures**

There are two sets of initial thoughts on key performance measures. Firstly, thinking of numbers and how could be simply presented. Richard recently met with Jeremy Grimshaw (Co-Chair of Cochrane) in Canada and asked him to come up with ideas. His idea is the one headed ‘quality of *The Cochrane Library*’. This was also shared with Jonathan Craig (Co-Chair) who had no additional points to add to this paper. This debate should be continued through emails so we end up with a set of metrics.

There is a lot of data we could get from Wiley quite easily – ie, the number of new reviews, hits on site, (broken down by country). David receives all comments on reviews. It is quite difficult to get the number of PDF downloads – there are three types available. These are requirements for the next stage of development at Wiley. Also hoping to include reviews that have been cited in guidelines.

Godwin asked whether *The Cochrane Library* has ever carried out a survey with *The Cochrane Library* users? It would be interesting to find what readers and authors think of the experience? Perhaps an
annual survey of a sample of authors and readers would be beneficial on getting subjective feedback. It was confirmed that no survey has been done to date. It would have to be carried out by Wiley and David Tovey said they would be receptive to that. ACTION: DT

**Complaints and Feedback**

The issue of complaints was raised and David Tovey confirmed that he will see any complaints for action, although we do not receive many. There are two on-going at moment. Review authors are required to respond to feedback. Feedback is not sufficiently visible at moment. Complaints go to the Review Group or to Editor-in-Chief directly. The feedback ideally should be published in three months and the Review Group should respond in six months. Some Reviews Groups do really well with this but the Feedback Group has been disbanded but will be reconvened by David Tovey. It should be understood that feedback and complaints are two different things.

Richard Smith asked could we be presented with data on feedback and the response times to feedback? This could be a useful resource for the Oversight Committee to record complaints and feedback. ACTION: David Tovey – present feedback and complaints.

Lisa stated that one issue is quality of feedback is not always good. Also, we are not good at responding in a timely manner and this is very variable by group. David Tovey thinks that Cochrane feedback is good with 70% presenting rational critique of trials. In general it is mostly thoughtful.

Richard asked if it was possible if the response could go straight on the website? David Tovey agrees with this and intends to implement this with the reconvening of the Feedback Group. We should be publishing all feedback. Some groups have a good Feedback Editor, ie: Pregnancy and Childbirth.

It should be noted that in the past it was published straight onto website but this practice was abandoned before David Tovey’s time. He feels that we should move back towards this.

David Moher stated that we should push to get metrics like PLoS Medicine’s on Cochrane Reviews. We should also have the ability for readers to rate the Reviews. It is slightly complicated in PLoS Medicine because you have to register in order to provide a rating, which can sometimes puts people off. He said that there are a large number of consumers within Cochrane and the rating of Reviews would be important to them. Possibly a link to GIN (Guidelines in International Networks) so that we can see where Cochrane Reviews have been used to develop and a link to UKMRC which now require evidence in the form of a systematic review to consider funding new trials. David also suggested that a relationship between Wiley and PLoS Medicine might help with article metrics. Article metrics are in evolution and should be able to be calculated in real time.

Prem – likes idea to get readers to rate. Also to get consumer view. However the number of readers that provide ratings on PLoS is not large.

Moving to Jeremy’s list which is quite comprehensive.

David confirmed that the quality impact approach is largely what we have been following.
In terms of quality, David feels that once we have agreed standards across the Reviews we should audit against standards regularly. Over the next 12 months David’s team will look at all abstracts, plain language summaries and summary of findings tables and measure them against agreed indicators from the handbook and then present back to the Review Groups and could easily present the Oversight Committee with our audit.

It is very difficult to measure comprehensiveness. David is reluctant to measure broad numbers. Review Groups need to determine what is comprehensive across their specialty. David is keen for each Review Group to say what they would like to cover over a 12 month period but this has not yet been implemented.

As Jeremy’s list was quite comprehensive it was agreed that David should provide a response and then discuss through email.

**ACTION:** David to provide a response to the two metric documents for discussion through email.

Lisa added that the Cochrane Collaboration has made a huge effort to get consumers involved so consumer rating of Reviews would be very useful. Possibly by survey.

Also, use of Cochrane Methods. Our review application RevMan is easy to access and use and it would be interesting to consider how often it is used without a review appearing in *The Cochrane Library* i.e. published elsewhere.

**ACTION:** Could David Tovey think about these two points.

David will respond to performance measures. Let’s get a definitive list to visit each year.

**Proposal for producing first report to the Steering Group**

It would be premature to report back after just one meeting. Richard will inform them of our meeting and forward Minutes.

**ACTION:** Richard will advise the Co-Chairs that the group has met and forward the Minutes to them.

Should the group be added to *The Cochrane Library*? Richard will write something to share with group and add to *The Cochrane Library* as editorial. Possibly for December.

**ACTION:** Richard will write an editorial.

**Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that the Oversight Committee should meet every three months. Next meeting – end of January 2011.

**ACTION:** Hilary will set up a doodle for next meeting.

If anybody has any action points for the next meeting they should email them in advance to Richard for inclusion in the Agenda.

Richard thanked everybody.