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28 – WONCA and the Cochrane Primary Health Care Field: opportunities for a synergetic collaboration

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The Cochrane Collaboration is a global independent network of more than 31,000 dedicated people from over 120 countries. It constitutes an equal partnership between health practitioners, researchers, health care providers and patient advocates. Its mission is to promote evidence-informed health decision-making by preparing, updating, and promoting the accessibility of Cochrane Reviews, published online in the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, part of The Cochrane Library (www.thecochranelibrary.com).

Cochrane Reviews are systematic reviews of primary research in human health care and health policy, and are the highest standard in evidence-based health care. The abstracts and plain language summaries of all Cochrane Reviews are also freely available on Cochrane Summaries (<http://summaries.cochrane.org/>), thus ensuring equal accessibility to anyone interested in evidence informed health care.

In January 2011, the World Health Organization (WHO) awarded Cochrane a seat on the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the WHO. This provides Cochrane an opportunity to promote evidence-based health care at the highest levels of international health care policy-setting.

The Cochrane Primary Health Care Field (CPHCF) and its Achievements

The Cochrane Collaboration (www.cochrane.org) is organised by 'entities' called 'groups' or 'fields'. *Primary Health Care* became the first registered field in October 1993. While the Cochrane Review Groups focus on production and promotion of Cochrane Reviews, Fields advocate the representation of certain interests in the Cochrane Reviews (for example a focus on setting, e.g. primary care, or patient groups, e.g. children). Furthermore, fields promote and enhance dissemination and implementation of evidence from systematic reviews in the area they represent.

Thus, the CPHCF aims to ensure that the primary care perspectives are adequately represented within the Cochrane Collaboration. Moreover, the field promotes and stimulates the development of Cochrane reviews which are more relevant and accessible to primary care (Van de Laar 2007).

Means to achieve these goals are, for example: introducing, supporting or linking primary care peer reviewers, or authors with Field-relevant expertise to Review Groups editors. In addition, the CPHCF tags existing reviews and review-protocols with ICPC-codes in order to make them more accessible to workers in primary care. This enables the products of the Collaboration to be accepted and adopted into practice.

We have developed two important ‘tools’ to assist us achieve our goals. Firstly, we have created the concept of PEARLS (Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations) which are very concise summaries of (Cochrane) reviews focusing on one Clinical question for direct implementation in practice (Arroll 2011). PEARLS are disseminated through the CPHCF website and Newsletter, The Cochrane Library, the WONCA website and the website of the New Zealand Guidelines Group. PEARLS have also been published in the Dutch Journals of *Huisarts en Wetenschap* and *Modern Medicine* and also at conference presentations.

Furthermore, we have developed the website www.cochranegetininvolved.org in which we welcome new collaborators in primary care research. Accordingly, this network is integrated into the formal Cochrane (‘Archie’) network and enhances (future) collaboration with primary care research and practice. The current focus is to expand this network and link it to the activities of the various Cochrane Review Groups.

Another spearhead of the CPHCF is the development of a register of studies on the development, validation and impact of Clinical Prediction Rules in primary care. This project is coordinated by the Dublin branch of the CPHCF and is supported by the HRB Centre for Primary Care Research (www.hrbcentreprimarycare.ie). So far, a register of over 700 CPRs have been identified. A reproducible search strategy to identify relevant CPRs has been developed that is enabling regular updating of the register. A searchable, web-based register is being developed and would form part of the Cochrane Primary Health Care Field activity. Other developments include assessment of CPRs in relation to their use in clinical practice guidelines, and a systematic review of randomized trials that assess the impact of CPRs in clinical practice in primary care.

Global Family Medicine and PHCF

WONCA and the Cochrane Collaboration share many important objectives. Both WONCA and the CPHCF aim to foster high standards of care in general practice. With this in mind, the Cochrane Collaboration produces high quality and accessible systematic reviews for the promotion of evidence-informed health decision making. Both organizations aim to promote health equity. Cochrane strives to achieve this by making the vast amounts of evidence generated through research useful and available to everyone (both practitioners and patients) interested in human health care. In addition, both WONCA and the CPHCF are academic initiatives which aim to collect, collate and disseminate information concerning the research aspects of general practice. And finally, both WONCA and Cochrane provide a forum for exchange of knowledge in the field of health and medical care.

WONCA has already important, established links with the Cochrane Collaboration. Cochrane output such as the Cochrane Library and PEARLS from the CPHCF are incorporated at the WONCA World website as important resources for general practitioners. Cochrane is also represented in WONCA through many individual members. We sincerely hope that Cochrane and WONCA will continue to collaborate in the promotion of evidence-based primary care.

Is Cochrane Helpful in Everyday Practice?

For some colleagues The Cochrane Collaboration may seem an academic initiative with only a distant association to every day practice. We believe that the opposite is true (Fahey 2013). Firstly, an efficient way in applying Evidence-based principles for your patients is searching, reading and using systematic reviews. Compared to primary studies, the information-density that comes from systematic reviews is enormous. The Cochrane systematic review aims to reduce publication bias. Moreover, the latter’s structured format makes them easily accessible for readers who are interested in part of the information only. And for those who like to cherry pick, there are many easy-to-read structured summaries available through the Cochrane summaries website, in particular for those primary care people who wish to receive the PEARLS that are distributed through the Primary Care Field. So do not hesitate and subscribe for the Field on www.cochranepriarycare.org.

Take Home Messages

- The Cochrane Collaboration publishes Systematic Reviews in order to support evidence based decision making in Health Care
- The Primary Care Health Care Field is the entity within Cochrane that represents family medicine and primary care in the Collaboration and vice versa
- The Field produces PEARLS which are concise and easy-to-read abstracts of Cochrane reviews aiming at specific clinical questions

