

SOUTH AFRICAN COCHRANE CENTRE

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It has been an exciting and challenging six months for the South African Cochrane Centre. Under the strong leadership of Acting Director, Nandi Siegfried, and our team of dedicated staff, the Centre has attained many achievements. Two are worthy of special mention:

- WHO Evidence-based Reproductive Health Care Programme

The SACC received a grant from the WHO Reproductive Health Division to develop an Evidence-based Reproductive Health Care Training programme for reproductive health care workers. The package comprises a 5-day workshop and accompanying training manuals. It has been successfully completed and will be implemented in eight African countries. Louise Spruyt, Specialist Scientist, is the project manager and you can read all about it on page 7.

- The HIV/AIDS Mentoring Programme
- The Mentoring Programme continues to grow and we are especially proud of our ability to assist new reviewers across the country by

linking them with more experienced mentors. Nandi Siegfried and Gail Kennedy, CRG of the HIV/AIDS Review Group, continue to provide help and assistance to reviewers and mentors alike and we currently have thirteen reviewers and seven mentors. We had a great response to our CCInfo advert for mentors and thanks to all those who have volunteered their time and expertise to assist with the programme.

In addition to the above, staff find time to work on Cochrane reviews and have published an impressive number of protocols recently. On top of all this we continue to run our regular training workshops, review group "problem-busting" sessions and journal club. After this busy year we are all looking forward to a well-earned holiday before tackling 2003! I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a blessed Festive Season and a prosperous New Year.

Joy Oliver
SACC Senior Officer

CONGRATULATIONS to Nandi Siegfried (SACC Acting Director) and her husband Luke on the birth of their daughter Romy, on 25 July 2002.



THE 10TH INTERNATIONAL COCHRANE COLLOQUIUM

IN STAVANGER, NORWAY

This year the 10th Cochrane Colloquium was held in Stavanger, Norway. Just the idea of visiting the land of the midnight sun was enough to get excited about! Getting there in the end proved to be another matter. All flights were booked and confirmed, but on getting to the airport I was told that KLM had cancelled their Cape Town to Amsterdam flight for that specific day because of a strike in Amsterdam. Fortunately they then found me a seat on British Airways and this afforded me the added bonus of a day spent in London.

The format of the meeting was slightly changed from the norm in that the focus was more on business meetings. Afternoons were devoted to a wide range of workshops. The only scientific presentations were in the form of posters of which two were from South Africa. Each day started with a plenary session during which a specific question was presented and then discussed by the members of the audience. From these sessions came the message that the Cochrane Collaboration has an important role to play in informing health care policy. We should also be striving to always improve on the quality of the reviews being produced and to ensure that the information is

presented in such a way that it is attractive to people - make them want to read what we write.

The specific issues covered during these sessions were:

- What is the role of the Cochrane Collaboration in informing health care decisions made by policy makers?
- Should Cochrane reviews move towards using standardised grades of evidence for each outcome?
- How can the quality of Cochrane reviews be improved?

The customary exchange of entity information session was again held this year. Victoria Pillay assisted me and our table was directly opposite the door of the venue. We not only handed out information about the SACC and its activities, but we also promoted the beauty and splendour of South Africa with our posters, pamphlets and maps! The comment was made that it was not possible to miss us as we had the most colourful table.

On the last night of the Colloquium we were hosted to a sumptuous banquet. Our hosts arrived in their traditional dress, showing that they are proud of who they are. At the start of the evening the Collaboration said goodbye to Sir Iain Chalmers



Stavanger Harbour



Old Town Stavanger

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Victoria Pillay at meet the Entities

who stepped down as director of the UK Cochrane Centre in September. This was a very moving ceremony as a number of people spoke about special moments they had shared with him through the years.

Another highlight of the evening was the 2002 Collaboravision Song Contest. A number of groups took part in this, but the star of the show was Prathap Tharyan from India. He did a solo performance and had to come back for another round after being announced the winner. His prize was a true Norwegian Troll! For Prathap it was a double deal as far as winning goes - he also won the Kenneth Warren Prize for his review titled *“Electroconvulsive therapy for schizophrenia.”*

Although this colloquium was jam-packed with meetings it was a wonderful experience. I would urge any other Cochrane Reviewer out there to try to attend a Cochrane Colloquium, it is something everyone should do at least once!

Elizabeth Pienaar
SACC Information Specialist

During the 10th International Cochrane Colloquium, I presented two posters:

- *The symptomatic treatment of the cough in Whooping Cough* (Victoria Pillay and George Swingler) where I presented research conducted during my internship tenure at the South African Cochrane Centre.
- *Issues facing developing country reviewers* (Victoria Pillay and Brian Van Wyk), wherein I highlighted particular problems that reviewers from developing countries experience.

Both posters were well received and sparked interesting and fruitful discussions.

The latter poster was complemented by a workshop I was invited to facilitate with George Rutherford, Aika Omari and Jimmy Volmink exploring ways to provide support for reviewers from developing countries. The workshop was attended by people

from both developed (UK, USA and Australia) and developing countries (Brazil, Malaysia and Egypt). Broad themes that were discussed during this workshop were mentorship and training (assistance with systematic review methods and statistical methods), conducting a review (funding, refereeing and consumer input) and dissemination of EBM products e.g. Evidence Uptake. Participants were given the opportunity to mention what they had to offer and what they needed.

My attendance at the 10th Annual Cochrane Colloquium was made possible through financial support from the Developing Country Stipends Committee and the Medical Research Council of South Africa, in particular the SACC and the Research Development Division. Thanks to these sponsorships I had a wonderful and rewarding growth experience as a young scientist in attending such a prestigious scientific event.

Victoria Pillay
Research Fellow
School of Child and Adolescent Health
Red Cross Children's Hospital



Down-town Stavanger

THE EHCAP MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

F O R F I R S T - T I M E R E V I E W E R S



Jeff Yengopal (front left) and fellow participants

In keeping with the SACC's commitment to providing training opportunities for reviewers from developing countries, I was awarded a scholarship by the department for International Development (DFID) through the Effective Health Care Alliance Programme (EHCAP) to attend a mentorship programme at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in July 2002. Academic staff on the course included Paul Garner (Head), Harriet MacLehose (Assistant Editor), Aika Omari & Helen Smith (Research Associates), Reive Robb & Vittoria Lutje (Information Retrieval Specialists).

The first week of the course was spent mainly on group discussions on how to obtain the title, background, objectives, criteria and outcomes of the review. We were also given a course on how to design eligibility forms for our reviews. Examples of forms from other studies was discussed and we were then given the task of designing a form for each of our own reviews. At the end of the week, we had a lecture and practical on how to extract adverse events reported in randomized controlled trials (RCTs).

The second week began with a lecture of the editorial processes that the Cochrane Infectious Disease Review Group follow. Guidelines were given on how to write reviews and protocols in keeping with the Cochrane style. This was followed by a group discussion on the eligibility forms. Each reviewer's form was critically appraised by the group and changes were suggested. The reviewers were then required to modify their eligibility forms and add this to the protocol.

Developing search strategies for reviews are an important aspect of the protocol development. Information on the various databases, search engines and techniques were provided and we were then given the task of developing a search strategy for our own reviews. I also visited the Oral Health Group at Manchester Dental School in Manchester where Sylvia Bickley (Information Retrieval Specialist) helped me develop and run the search strategy for the Oral Health Group Specialist Trial Register.

At the end of the week, we attended a statistics workshop presented by Carrol Preston, Catrin Tudor-Smith and Ashley Jones from the Biostatistics Department of the University of

Liverpool. We had a structured programme that included training sessions on meta-analysis of binary and continuous data, quality assessments, data extraction, heterogeneity and publication bias. This was by far the most intensive day on the programme. We also had to hand in our protocols in the RevMan format for assessment.

The third week of the programme dealt with the methods and data extraction part of the protocol. We also had individual sessions with the statistician, Carrol Preston. This was extremely useful and many of us had to fundamentally change large chunks of our methods section. The idea was to improve the overall protocol, especially the statistical aspects. We also had a workshop on designing data extraction forms for our reviews.

At the end of the week, a group session was held where we were given the data extraction form for a review that was already completed together with 2 included RCTs. We were asked to fill in the data extraction form for these studies. Data extraction is the most crucial aspect of the review as one is often required to use information in the study to calculate the statistic you require or you have to make estimates or educated guesses regarding some of the data at your disposal. Once this task is completed accurately, data can easily be entered into RevMan and results obtained. Each participant was required to hand in their protocol in the RevMan format (background, objectives, criteria, outcomes, search strategy, methods, references) for evaluation by lead editors in the Infectious Cochrane Diseases Review Group at Liverpool.

We spent the final week tidying up the protocol, modifying the data extraction forms, running our search strategies in *The Cochrane Library*, collecting RCTs relevant for our reviews and learning how to use *The Cochrane Library*. These tasks were completed during individual and/or group sessions with our supervisors.

On the final day of the course, we gave feedback on all aspects of the course by filling in a feedback questionnaire. We also had to hand in our protocols and retrieve articles that was needed for our reviews. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this course for empowering new reviewers with the necessary skills to undertake a Cochrane Review.

On a lighter note, I had the opportunity to visit Liverpool, Manchester, London, and lots of other interesting places. The culture, lifestyle, climate and people are very different to what we know in Cape Town/SA. I also made a lot of new friends from throughout the world who live, work and study in England.

Dr V Yengopal

Registrar: Community Dentistry | University of Stellenbosch

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PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

"The meeting will bring together people from a wide variety of disciplines interested in going beyond the basics of systematic reviewing" - Words written below a romantic, misty, black and white photograph of Oxford's pinnacles on the front page of the programme.

The 4th Symposium on Systematic Reviews took place from 2-4 July 2002 at St Catherine's College in Oxford in the United Kingdom. The symposium focused on research relating to the methods and problems of preparing and using systematic reviews, with the challenging topic: *Pushing the Boundaries*.

On the first day we delved into issues relating to making use of reviews, adverse events and quality of life, complexity and, finally, bias. On the second day we explored quality of completeness, meta-analysis and, to conclude, trial identification and quality. Interesting interactive involvement included opaque envelopes sent around the audience, together with small flashlights, to demonstrate an easy way to do away with allocation concealment without anybody knowing!

Louise Spruyt and Martie Muller from the South African Cochrane Centre both presented posters, titled *What a facelift can't fix - working with old trials*¹ and *A case-study of quality assessment of non-randomised intervention studies*².

Meetings of several methods groups, including the Non-randomized Studies Group, Adverse Events Group, Reporting Bias Group and Statistical Methods Group, took place before and after the Symposium. These provided good opportunities for lively discussions, getting up to date with new developments and planning the way ahead.

Apart from pushing the academic boundaries during the day, we also pushed the social boundaries during the evenings with a welcoming cocktail on the Wednesday and a superb banquet on the Thursday. Strangers became friends and colleagues working on different sides of the world could share a meal!

The symposium did indeed bring together 250 people from around the world - people from a wide variety of disciplines interested in going beyond the basics of systematic reviewing and ...we did indeed push the boundaries!

REFERENCES

- 1 What a facelift can't fix - working with old trials. L Spruyt, N Siegfried, P Matchaba, J Volmink.
- 2 A case-study of quality assessment of non-randomised intervention studies: male circumcision and transmission of HIV. M Muller, N Siegfried, J Deeks, J Volmink, M Egger, N Low, P Williamson.

Martie Muller

*Institute for Maritime Technology
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Martie Muller



Louise Spruyt

COCHRANE

CONSUMER NETWORK AFRICA

R E I N F O R C E D

The Cochrane Consumer Network Africa (CCNA) had a boost in June 2002 when the host institution, the Consumer Information Network of Kenya (C.I.N.), allocated more space and more computer time for the activities of CCNA. C.I.N., at its strategic planning meeting and staff retreat held in July 2002, fully recognised CCNA activities as part of their activities for which it would endeavour to support. The CCNA volunteer staff, including Samuel Ochieng and Nelly Orifa, both joined the rest of the C.I.N. staff and board members into the pomp and dance of the retreat and to the very serious discussions on priority action areas for C.I.N. within the next 2 to 3 years. C.I.N. in its new draft strategic plan now recognises the Cochrane activities within its broader activities under its health programme. The way CCNA views it, this support is necessary for enhanced activism of the CCNA and has come at the right time. Both the CCNA co-ordinator and the assistant co-ordinator now puts in more of their time.

As a result of this, CCNA will soon finish the upgrading of its membership list that would now be entirely electronic. This would serve to enhance communication within the Network and between CCNA and its collaborators.

In the meantime, CCNA brochures are expected to be ready for distribution by December 2002. These are targeted to new-comers and to policy makers as a way of enhancing consumers' participation in the activities of the Collaboration. They also encourage policy makers to make use of evidence-

based Cochrane information to make informed health care decisions. These brochures are part of the strategy to double the number of the Network members in Africa by the time the next Colloquium takes place.

The other important recent development for CCNA is the establishment of the Cochrane Consumer Network Governing Council and the allocation of a seat for a representative from Africa. Even though this seat has not been filled yet, it is apparent that CCNA will now directly participate in the policy formulation at the CCN. The slot will be filled by nomination and voting.

The progress that is being made by the Developing Countries Initiative and the active involvement of the CCNA and the South African Cochrane Centre (SACC) is another instrument that would strategically enhance Africa's effective presence in the activities of the Cochrane Collaboration.

For more information on what is happening at the Cochrane Consumer Network Africa (CCNA), please contact:

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EBRHC TRAINING INITIATIVE



Participants at EBRHC workshop

The SACC, with the able assistance of Ms Jawaya Small (a midwife and a Health Education Consultant from the Red Cross Hospital Child and Family Unit) has just completed an Evidence-based Reproductive Health Care (EBRHC) Training Programme. This initiative was funded by World Health Organisation (WHO) Afro (WHO regional office for Africa). They commissioned the SACC to develop a training programme that would target different professional groups such as policy makers, medical and nursing academics and midwives with one package and of which monitoring and evaluation would be an essential feature. The programme was also to have a component for 'Training the Trainer' as it was envisaged that this programme would be extended into six different African countries where local people would be identified as trainers. A training programme was developed which comprised of a 4-day workshop together with:

- two manuals, one for participants and one for those participants who would be identified as trainers and would therefore undergo one extra day (day 4 of the workshop) of training;
- a 'board game' to test the theoretical aspects of the workshop and to instill an element of fun into the learning process; and
- the necessary evaluation and monitoring tools.

In order to ensure maximum participation of the participants in the learning process, the workshop included a number of presentations, group work, case studies to be discussed in groups or pairs, practical sessions and games. The practical sessions were devoted to teaching the participants to use the WHO Reproductive Health Library. This is a CD-Rom which is

distributed by the Reproductive Health and Research Department of WHO free of charge - which is an essential tool in the practice of EBRHC.

An EBRHC boardgame, similar to Snakes and Ladders, was developed to be played in groups. The illustrations used for the background of the boardgame typify the public health problems inherent in developing countries in a lighthearted vein.

The first pilot of the EBRHC workshop was held in Cape Town from 14 - 19 April 2002. This workshop was attended by twenty participants who represented all the different professional groups identified above. Prof. Oluwole Akande, a WHO consultant and Prof. Justus Hofmeyr, acted as external evaluators. The response to the first pilot workshop was overwhelmingly positive from both the participants and the external evaluators.

Dr Louise Spruyt from the SACC was recently invited to present the EBRHC training programme to the WHO funders at the WHO headquarters in Geneva.

In December 2002 implementation of the package will start with a 'Training of Master Trainers' workshop in Cape Town. Workshops will be held in Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zambia during 2003.

Louise Spruyt
SACC Specialist Scientist

THE AUSTRALASIAN COCHRANE REVIEW COMPLETION PROGRAMME

In June this year I was very fortunate to be able to attend a Cochrane Review Completion programme in Melbourne, Australia. Through the South African Cochrane Centre (SACC) I was awarded a scholarship by the Department for International Development (DFID) via the Effective Health Care Alliance Programme (EHCAP). This five-day course was held at the Australasian Cochrane Centre located at the Monash Medical University Campus in Clayton. The hosts were Sally Green, Steve MacDonald, Jason Wasiak and Janet Piehl.

The course was held from 17-21 June 2002 and its' objectives were threefold:

1. to ensure dedicated time towards completing the review;
2. to provide support in all aspects of writing a review, including help with literature searching, data extraction, statistical analysis, discussion and editing; and
3. to target lectures and discussion about areas of difficulty within their review

My initial uneasiness about the sudden change of plans (Jeff Yengopal and I were originally meant to attend a systematic reviewer's course together in Liverpool) and the fact that I would now be traveling alone was appeased just as I boarded the aeroplane. I felt my 5 month old unborn baby kick for the very first time and never felt lonely again.

I fondly remember our first introduction to Sally Green, who (quite convincingly) said that the course actually had no formal structure. A few moments of silence ensued (with everyone looking rather puzzled), whereafter, she smiled reassuringly and added that the course would be structured around the reviewers 'needs'. Sighs of relief echoed amongst the 8 reviewers attending the course - Liz Elliot, Jane Lloyd, Joan Ostaszkiwicz, Russell Gruen and Lisa O'Brien (Australia); Sally Merry (New Zealand); Britta Eickhoff (Germany) and myself, Haly Holmes (South Africa).

The title of my review is: *Prevention and management of oro-pharyngeal candidiasis in HIV positive adults and children*. My objectives for the next 5 days was to dedicate time to completing as much of my review as possible and to 'iron out' problem areas such as heterogeneity, data analysis and sensitivity analysis. There was so much to do and so little time - time seemed to pass by so quickly, with all the reviewers working religiously (from 9am to 7pm) to complete their reviews. The working hours were filled with:

- discussions on heterogeneity;
- ensuring that your search strategies was adequate;
- how to retrieve maximum information using data extraction forms;
- individual work on reviews;
- editing and re-editing;
- analyzing your data;
- when and how to do a meta-analysis using RevMan; and
- networking with other reviewers.

The 'after working hours' were filled with some fine Australian cuisine sampling, lots of sight-seeing (even though it was by moonlight) and well deserved sleep. We all unanimously agreed that the time spent at the Australasian Cochrane Centre was extremely valuable.

The success of my trip cannot only be measured by me achieving my objectives, but also by my vivid memories of such a beautiful country and hospitable people - an invaluable opportunity afforded to me by the South African and the Australasian Cochrane Centres.

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