



## **Want to comment on a Cochrane review but do not know what is expected of you?**

### About peer reviewers for Cochrane review groups

Cochrane Review Groups are responsible for the development of Cochrane reviews, published electronically on The Cochrane Library. The review groups work with review authors to ensure that a well-defined process is followed. Review Groups provide editorial support and peer reviewers to work through review methods, search strategies, the statistical treatment of data from the individual studies and the medical or healthcare content; the publishers provide additional support in final copy editing. Consumers active in Cochrane have a very unique and important role – to use their real life knowledge and experience to address the review from a user or receiver of health care perspective.

### The view of the Cochrane Consumer Network

Only the consumer can provide the unique perspective of a receiver of health care - by putting themselves in the position of the person who may read the review or review summary to consider starting or continuing a healthcare intervention. As important is the ability to assess the size of any beneficial effect that can be expected and what possible adverse effects are associated with the intervention. Can we make this information more accessible? The patient or the person who cares for them needs the opportunity to access accurate information about the condition and its treatment options with the facts presented honestly in terms of benefits and harms and in user friendly language.

### What is needed from a consumer?

Address the question 'what would I want to know if I found myself (or someone close to me) with this diagnosis/recommended this treatment?'

- Identify consumer needs for information when considering the background, review question, objectives and outcomes and in weighing up the significance of reported results – from the viewpoint of patients and caregivers.
- Is the review addressing the things that are important to consumers 'at large'?
- Do I understand the review question and is it clear from the title of the review?
- Have I been given enough comprehensible information in the background section to understand the issues?
- Is it clear what people and interventions (including the comparator) are being looked at, in which settings and for how long?

- In the big picture, are outcomes that I am interested in being looked at and in a way that I can assess whether or not I am comfortable with the information about the efficacy and possible trade offs of this intervention?

Overall, is the review useful to patients? Furthermore, if someone was to use this review for policy decisions or preparing information for patients would the contents of the review satisfy their needs/omit any important considerations?

### Summary relevant questions

Particularly relevant questions for reviews are:

Is the review question clear – why is the review being done? Can I see things like the doses or amounts used; what exactly was the intervention compared against? How long was treatment for (weeks, months, years) and is this relevant in ‘real life’?

From the information in the review, does the intervention have benefits, what benefits and how much – is this a meaningful amount? Are harms and long term consequences evident?

What are the limitations in the included studies and people studied from my patient perspective - what other information would be useful?

Do the summaries of the review (abstract and shorter summary) give me the relevant information and is it presented in an accessible meaningful way? Could I use the information to help me in shared decision making with my service provider?

Please note: We are not medical ‘experts’ and are not expected to comment on all parts of the review (e.g. search strategies and statistical methodologies). Consumers are consulted because of our personal experience with a condition; we know what information is important for individual consumers.

Many people are attracted as health consumers to the principles and philosophies behind the work of Cochrane but the task of commenting (effectively) on Cochrane protocols and systematic reviews is difficult. This is why peer support is offered as you undertake the task of commenting on a review from a consumer perspective.

Thank you for your vital contribution to Cochrane.