What is the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is a collection of databases providing the best available evidence about the effects of healthcare. There are 7 databases in total including the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials.

Background

Work on the Cochrane Library began in 1992 following the development of the NHS Information Systems Strategy. Three major initiatives formed part of the strategy:

- UK Cochrane Centre
- Centre for Reviews and Dissemination
- National Research Register

The UK Cochrane Centre (Oxford) works closely with the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (York) to produce the Cochrane Library.

UK Cochrane Centre (UKCC)

The UK Cochrane Centre was established at the end of 1992 to support and co-ordinate the work of the Cochrane Collaboration in producing and maintaining systematic reviews. There are a growing number of Cochrane Centres around the world.

Cochrane Collaboration

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international network of individuals committed to producing and maintaining systematic reviews on the effects of healthcare.

Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD)

The Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD), based at the University of York, both conducts and commissions reviews of healthcare interventions. It supports the review process through the production of guidelines and training on how to produce good quality reviews. The Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE), Health Technology Assessment Database (HTA) and the NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED) are produced and maintained by CRD.

What is a Systematic Review?

A systematic review is defined as "a review of a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect and analyse data from the studies that are included in the review. Statistical methods (meta-analysis) may or may not be used to analyse and summarise the results of the included studies." [accessed 13 October 2017]

What is a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT)?

A randomised controlled trial is "an experiment in which two or more interventions, possibly including a control intervention or no intervention, are compared by being randomly allocated to participants. In most trials one intervention is assigned to each individual but sometimes assignment is to defined groups of individuals (for example, in a household) or interventions are assigned within individuals (for example, in different orders or to different parts of the body)." [accessed 13 October 2017]

The Cochrane Library

The Cochrane Library is the ‘best single source of reliable evidence about the effects of healthcare.’ It contains information on the effectiveness of interventions that include drugs, therapies, diagnosis, screening, the organisation of healthcare and health promotion. It does not contain information about general aspects of healthcare, causal, prognosis, epidemiology or statistical information.

The Cochrane Library is made up of 7 databases:

1. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)
2. Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effect (DARE)
3. Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)
4. Cochrane Methodology Register (CMR)
5. Health Technology Assessment Database (HTA)
6. NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED)
7. About the Cochrane Collaboration (About)

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR; Cochrane Reviews)

CDSR is a full-text database containing protocols and completed Cochrane Systematic Reviews on the effectiveness of healthcare interventions prepared by Cochrane Review Groups in the Cochrane Collaboration. The reviews are regularly updated and represent the highest level of evidence to support healthcare decisions. Completed systematic reviews are indexed in Medline and Embase.

As of Issue 2 of the Cochrane Library (2007), this database also includes the methodology reviews that were previously part of the Cochrane Database of Methodology Reviews (CDMR). These reviews are full-
text ongoing and completed systematic reviews of empirical methodological studies, prepared by the Cochrane Methodology Review Group. They aim to summarise the empirical basis for decisions about methods of systematic reviews and healthcare evaluations.

Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effect (DARE; Other Reviews)

DARE is an international register of quality assessed reviews on the effectiveness of healthcare interventions and the management and organisation of health services. CRD reviewers assess the reviews according to quality criteria and provide a critical commentary on the quality and rigour of the methodology together with implications for research and practice. DARE complements CDSR by providing details of systematic reviews in subject areas not currently available in CDSR. DARE ceased in March 2015 and contains records up to the end of 2014.

Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL; Trials)

CENTRAL contains bibliographic citations (some with an abstract) of thousands of randomised controlled trials or controlled clinical trials. These have been identified by Cochrane Review Groups from bibliographic databases, hand searching journals, ongoing trials registers and pharmaceutical companies. There is a large overlap between this database and Medline.

Cochrane Methodology Register (CMR; Methods Studies)

CMR contains bibliographic citations (some with an abstract) on how to conduct systematic reviews and controlled clinical trials. It is intended to be useful to both those who are new to reviewing and to provide additional information to those who are more experienced. It contains a variety of records that include references to books, conference proceedings and journal articles. As of July 2012, CMR is currently under review and is not being updated.

Health Technology Assessment Database (HTA; Technology Assessments)

The HTA database contains reports, bibliographic citations and ongoing projects of health technology assessments produced by members of INAHTA and other HTA organisations. A health technology assessment is defined as "prevention and rehabilitation, vaccines, pharmaceuticals, and devices, medical and surgical procedures, and the systems within which health is protected and maintained." (CRD, University of York). The aim of the database is to highlight studies of the medical, social, ethical and economic implications of healthcare interventions. Records are descriptive and provide a summary of the reports rather than critical assessment. Contact details for further information are provided, where available.

NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED; Economic Evaluations)

NHS EED is an international register of quality assessed economic evaluations of healthcare interventions. Records are assessed by CRD reviewers and provide a structured summary of the content and quality of the economic evaluation, together with any practical implications for the NHS. NHS EED ceased in March 2015 and contains records up to the end of 2014.

About the Cochrane Collaboration (About; Cochrane Groups)

This database contains information and contact details for the various Cochrane review groups, fields, networks and centres. Records contain background information, details of the structure and scope of the groups, review methods and detailed search strategies used to identify clinical trials.

Publication Frequency in the Cochrane Library

CDSR is published daily, CENTRAL monthly and HTA quarterly. Archived versions of DARE, CMR and NHS EED are hosted in the Cochrane Library until further notice.

Accessing the Cochrane Library

The Cochrane Library can be accessed remotely from the e-Resources page on the RSM website: https://www.rsm.ac.uk/e-resources.aspx by logging in to the Databases using your registered RSM username and password. Once the databases opening screen has loaded, click on the Cochrane Library link in the bottom right corner. Alternatively, go directly to: http://www.cochranelibrary.com.

If you are based in the UK, free full-text access to Cochrane reviews is available by any of these access points. For a list of National Provisions (countries or regions where everyone has free full-text access), click on the Get Access option from the Help drop-down on the top toolbar of the Cochrane Library home page.

Further Information

A helpsheet is also available on how to search the Cochrane Library. Please ask at the Library Enquiry Desk or access the helpsheet online at: https://www.rsm.ac.uk/library/e-resources.aspx

For further information about the Cochrane Collaboration, visit their website at: http://www.cochrane.org

Please contact us if you require any further assistance using the databases or wish to book a tutorial. Contact details are provided in the banner of this helpsheet.