CONFERENCE REVIEW

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Organised by the Australasian Cochrane Centre, the 2006 annual symposium for Australasian contributors to The Cochrane Collaboration, was attended by 64 representatives of Australian and International Cochrane Field and Group entities.

As a relatively small meeting compared to the annual Cochrane Colloquia, the two-day symposium in Adelaide enabled an excellent forum for discussion and knowledge exchange, as presenters provided new and exciting insights into changes that are currently affecting, or will soon affect, both review authors and staff of Cochrane entities and satellites.

Highlights from the sessions included:

- The development of a new schema for assessing studies for risk of bias in reviews, led by Julian Higgins and Philippa Middleton (Cochrane Statistical Methods Group), which raised some very interesting points of discussion regarding components and tools for assessing the quality of reviews, based on recent studies as examples to support the plan. Spin-offs from the presentation promoted further enquiry into review bias, focusing on study randomisation, allocation of concealment, reporting methods, blinding etc. which are crucial components of evidence based medicine and scientific rigour.
- Guidance for review authors on preparing plain language summaries (PLS) of Cochrane reviews to assist consumers of health care in patient decision making, was led by Janet Wale (Cochrane Consumer Network), with further presentation of knowledge translation strategies and patient case examples, provided by Nancy Santesso (Cochrane Musculoskeletal EPOC Group). The topic of writing plain language summaries was extended on Day 2 in a concurrent morning session, led by Janet and Nancy, raising further discussion of the guidelines for PLS between consumers and reviewers, which led to some very insightful and valuable knowledge of consumer perspectives and expectations of PLS.
- Nick Royle (Chief Executive Officer, Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat) and Mark Davies (Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group) led a presentation on issues relating

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to the Cochrane Library and provided some interesting and novel insights into the development of the “new look” library in relation to its new layout, colour scheme, accessibility etc. In addition to the new look Cochrane Library interface and search engine, Nick also raised discussion relating to new influences and considerations behind co-publication of Cochrane reviews in other journals, and the release of the Cochrane Library ISI journal impact factor in 2008.

The implementation of umbrella reviews was led by Mark Davies who presented the framework for bringing together evidence from multiple Cochrane reviews into an umbrella review, with the intention of adding structure to current reviews and summarising existing information in Cochrane reviews.

While the 2006 Australasian Cochrane Symposium was described as being structured for review authors, the presenters conveyed their issues and topics so well that they could have been of interest and value to a much wider audience.

The advantage of attending smaller symposia can be very beneficial to networking and collaborating, and in facilitating participation in more manageable and meaningful group discussions which have the potential to make a difference.

Cochrane Links

Australasian Cochrane Centre: www.cochrane.org.au

Cochrane Prehospital and Emergency Health Field: www.cochranepehf.org

Cochrane Collaboration: www.cochrane.org

Latest Cochrane reviews: www.cochrane.org/reviews/

The Cochrane Library: www.thecochranelibrary.com