Ten years of updating Cochrane reviews: the experience of the Pregnancy and Childbirth Group

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Objective

To determine the current status of reviews published 10 years ago to identify why reviews are out-of-date

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Annual Growth of Reviews

- Number of Reviews
- Year

- 1995: 2 staff
- 1996: 4.6 staff
- 1997: 7.0 staff
- 1998: 10.6 staff
- 1999: 13.4 staff
- 2000: 16.0 staff
- 2001: 19.3 staff
- 2002: 22.2 staff
- 2003: 25.0 staff
- 2004: 27.5 staff
- 2005: 29.7 staff
- 2006: 32.8 staff
Definition

Updated review

new search + new trial reports incorporated into revised review
(every 2 years)
Substantive updates ‘flagged’
Input from editorial office BEFORE authors start update

- **Trials Search Co-ordinator (TSC)** searches PCG register + sends results to author

- PCG specialised register of trials
Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group

Total Reviews Published

Status of 1996 reviews in 2006
n = 84

Up-to-date n = 29
Transferred n = 2
Withdrawn n = 22
Out-of-date n = 31
31 out-of-date reviews from 1996
10 years on

Collaboration policy (every 2 years) = 31 x 5
155

Actual number of updates
40

Number of trial reports in register for assessment
348
31 out-of-date reviews from 1996

Percentages

- New authors: $n = 15$
- Time barriers: $n = 23$
- New protocol: $n = 9$
31 Reviews

- Never updated
  - New protocol n = 5
  - New team n = 5
  - Time barriers n = 6

- One update
  - New protocol n = 4
  - New team n = 8
  - Time barriers n = 9

- > one update
  - New protocol n = 0
  - New team n = 2
  - Time barriers n = 8
Barriers to updating

2. Methodological
3. Content
4. Technological
5. Personal
6. Time
Strategies

1. General reminder
2. Individual reminders
3. Updating work-ins (e.g., Australian satellite; Australian CC; UKCC, CRG at Colloquium)
4. Visit to editorial office
5. Withdrawal of complimentary CD
6. Prioritise updates with editor taking lead
7. Editorial base updating support
8. Funding by other interested parties (UK Department of Health; Health Technology Assessment; Cochrane Fields)
9. Updates written by member of editorial office staff
Updating: complex + time consuming

To improve quality:

• RevMan x 4
• Cochrane Handbook x 4
• Guidelines for titles
• Abstracts
• Plain language summaries (Synopses)
• Feedback (Comments and criticisms)
• Cochrane Style Guide x 3
Updating: complex and time consuming

1. Developed editorial process (statistical/consumers)
2. Moved from trial driven to question driven reviews
3. New proposals can have impact on updating
4. More and more RCTs
   1996 = 200 per year
   2006 = 800 per year
Case study

Antenatal corticosteroids for accelerating fetal lung maturation for women at risk of preterm labour

(1996 title = Corticosteroids prior to preterm delivery)
What’s new?

• New team of authors
• Methodology updated
• New protocol published
• Search updated
• Results from recent follow-up studies included
• Standardised with other relevant published reviews
• Responses to feedback
• Improvement in readability
• Conclusions …… little change

new information

• Recommendation for practice + research …………… no change
Are we asking too much of authors and editorial teams?

2007
• Number of published reviews = 300

2017
• 2-YEARLY updating policy = 1500 new versions (+ new protocols + new reviews)