

The impact of Cochrane Reviews: a mixed-methods evaluation of outputs from Cochrane Review Groups supported by the National Institute for Health Research

Frances Bunn,^{1*} Daksha Trivedi,¹ Phil Alderson,²
Laura Hamilton,¹ Alice Martin,¹ Emma Pinkney¹
and Steve Iliffe³

¹Centre for Research in Primary and Community Care, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK

²Centre for Clinical Practice, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Manchester, UK

³Research Department of Primary Care and Population Health, UCL Medical School, London, UK

*Corresponding author

Declared competing interests of authors: Frances Bunn and Daksha Trivedi are editors with the Cochrane Injuries Group, Phil Alderson is an employee of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and was employed by the UK Cochrane Centre (UKCC) from 1998 to 2004 and was seconded part time to the UKCC from May 2013 to March 2014, Frances Bunn, Daksha Trivedi, Phil Alderson and Steve Iliffe are all authors on Cochrane Reviews and Phil Alderson has also published papers about Cochrane Reviews.

Published April 2015

DOI: 10.3310/hta19280

Plain English summary

The impact of Cochrane Reviews

Health Technology Assessment 2015; Vol. 19: No. 28

DOI: 10.3310/hta19280

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain English summary

Cochrane produces systematic reviews evaluating the effectiveness of health-care interventions. These reviews are produced by Cochrane Review Groups (CRGs) and published on The Cochrane Library. Twenty CRGs are based in the UK and receive funding from the National Institute for Health Research.

The aim of our study was to assess the value of Cochrane Reviews produced by those groups by looking at the way they have been used by health-service providers, policy-makers, researchers and service users. For example, have they been used in developing guidance, such as that produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, or have they identified gaps in the evidence and led to new research? We used a mixture of methods: we sent questionnaires to CRGs and review authors, interviewed guideline developers, reviewed existing documents and looked at the number of times the reviews had been cited in other research papers or guidelines.

We found evidence that policy-makers use Cochrane Reviews to inform clinical guidance both in the UK and around the world. However, policy-makers found reviews less helpful if they were out of date or if they had asked too narrow a question. There is evidence that Cochrane Reviews identify areas for new research and provide an important source of knowledge about the value of different treatments. Although there is some evidence that they influence the behaviour of health-care providers, and lead to benefits for the health service, these are more difficult to prove.

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 5.116

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, The Cochrane Library and the ISI Science Citation Index and is assessed for inclusion in the Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects.

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: nihredit@southampton.ac.uk

The full HTA archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hta. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the *Health Technology Assessment* journal

Reports are published in *Health Technology Assessment* (HTA) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HTA programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

Reviews in *Health Technology Assessment* are termed 'systematic' when the account of the search appraisal and synthesis methods (to minimise biases and random errors) would, in theory, permit the replication of the review by others.

HTA programme

The HTA programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was set up in 1993. It produces high-quality research information on the effectiveness, costs and broader impact of health technologies for those who use, manage and provide care in the NHS. 'Health technologies' are broadly defined as all interventions used to promote health, prevent and treat disease, and improve rehabilitation and long-term care.

The journal is indexed in NHS Evidence via its abstracts included in MEDLINE and its Technology Assessment Reports inform National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance. HTA research is also an important source of evidence for National Screening Committee (NSC) policy decisions.

For more information about the HTA programme please visit the website: <http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hta>

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 12/203/03. The contractual start date was in April 2013. The draft report began editorial review in September 2013 and was accepted for publication in November 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2015. This work was produced by Bunn *et al.* under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).

Editor-in-Chief of *Health Technology Assessment* and NIHR Journals Library

Professor Tom Walley Director, NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies and Director of the HTA Programme, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor Ken Stein Chair of HTA Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

Professor Andree Le May Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (EME, HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

Dr Martin Ashton-Key Consultant in Public Health Medicine/Consultant Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Professor Matthias Beck Chair in Public Sector Management and Subject Leader (Management Group), Queen's University Management School, Queen's University Belfast, UK

Professor Aileen Clarke Professor of Public Health and Health Services Research, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Dr Tessa Crilly Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Peter Davidson Director of NETSCC, HTA, UK

Ms Tara Lamont Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Professor Elaine McColl Director, Newcastle Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, UK

Professor William McGuire Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads Professor of Health Sciences Research, Faculty of Education, University of Winchester, UK

Professor John Powell Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

Professor James Raftery Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

Professor Helen Roberts Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Institute of Child Health, UK

Professor Helen Snooks Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Please visit the website for a list of members of the NIHR Journals Library Board:
www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact: nihredit@southampton.ac.uk