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19th September 1997

Professor Chris Silagy,
Chair of Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group,
Cochrane Collaboration Secretariat,
PO Box 726,
Oxford OX2 7UX.

Dear Professor Silagy,

The time has come for the prospective Cochrane Skin Group to apply for formal registration with the Cochrane Collaboration. Developing this new and important group has been done in close consultation from its inception with Iain Chalmers from the UK Cochrane Centre. At my last meeting with Iain in Oxford, we worked through the checklist for CRG registration, and we were of the opinion that all of the criteria had been fulfilled. I would now like to deal with the background and specific issues of the prospective Cochrane Skin Group in more detail :

Background to the Cochrane Skin Group

Interest in forming a Cochrane Skin Group began with a few individuals as far back as 1992. Three meetings have since been held to inform individuals of the nature of the Cochrane Collaboration and to enlist their commitment. The first 'pre-exploratory' meeting was held at the University of Nottingham and was attended by Iain Chalmers, Tina Funnell of the National Eczema Society, Chris Griffiths and Robert Chalmers (both dermatologists at Manchester), Alain Li Wan Po from the Department of Clinical Pharmaceutics at Nottingham, and myself. It was decided at that meeting that there was sufficient enthusiasm to consider holding a formal exploratory meeting, and this was held on Friday 17 and Saturday 18 May 1996 at the British Association of Dermatologist's new office at 19 Fitzroy Square, London. All individuals who had registered an interest in systematic reviews with respect to skin disease with Cochrane centres throughout the world were invited to this meeting. If they were unable to attend they were asked to give an indication of how they wish to be involved with the work of the group. Minutes of the meeting are enclosed with this application.

During the first day of the exploratory meeting, examples of systematic reviews that had already been prepared in dermatology were discussed. Iain Chalmers demonstrated the Cochrane Library and this was followed by a discussion of how we might develop a register of relevant trials. Potential overlap with other groups was discussed carefully, and Nicky Cullum, co-ordinating editor of the Cochrane Wounds Group kindly came along to the meeting with this in mind. At the end of that exploratory meeting, there was unequivocal support for moving forward to establish a Cochrane Skin Group. Those present at the exploratory meeting were individuals who were genuinely committed to collaborating in order to produce reviews of important health care problems affecting patients with skin problems.

Consumer involvement has been prominent from the outset of the group, and the group is also truly international and multi-disciplinary. Editorial structure was established at the meeting, with myself as co-ordinating editor and Luigi Naldi (Italy), Thomas Diepgen (Germany), Alain Li Wan Po (Nottingham) and Dédéé Murrell (Australia) as the editorial team. Following the above meetings, I circulated the 47 prospective members of our group an invitation to commit themselves further to getting involved with specific reviews or contributing to the specialised register of controlled trials.

At the exploratory meeting, it was suggested that the prospective Cochrane Skin Group might attract funds for a co-ordinator by holding an informing and funding meeting with a range of potential funders, such as the Department of Health, representatives from the drug industry and consumer groups. This awareness and funding meeting was organised closely with patient representatives from the Skin Care Campaign and was held in London on Monday 23 September 1996. A report of this meeting is included with this document. Following the meeting, a number of influential individuals from the drug industry agreed to get together with view to considering the possibility of corporate funding for a co-ordinator and additional support for the editorial base in Nottingham. We have yet to receive a firm commitment for such corporate funding. We can reassure you that any industry sponsored funding will not be linked under any circumstance to any specific review. It is hoped that the Skin Care Campaign (a UK patient group) will administer the funds for infra structure to support the Cochrane Skin Group, so that a clear boundary is placed between industry and those conducting specific reviews. We have since been successful in attracting funding for a co-ordinator and infrastructure support from the NHS Executive Trent Region Research and Development Office.

The second meeting of the prospective Cochrane Skin Group was held in London at the British Association of Dermatologists headquarters on May 16/17th 1997. Sixteen individuals attended from a range of countries and professional backgrounds. The theme of the meeting was that of converting the enthusiasm shown at the exploratory meeting into Cochrane output that was realistic and achievable over the next 18 months. Minutes of the meeting and agreed targets are enclosed.

Following the meeting, Professor Kent Woods on the Trent Region Research & Development Office agreed in writing to provide infrastructure support to the prospective Cochrane Skin Group until the end of the next financial year. At that time, he believes that there will be a mechanism open to UK Cochrane entities to request funding from national research and development sources.

Specific items required for CRG registration

- a. **Process** - I can confirm that plans for the Cochrane Skin Group were developed from the outset in close consultations with Iain Chalmers from the UK Cochrane Centre. Alessandro Liberati from the Italian Cochrane Centre has also been involved in supporting Luigi Naldi, and Jos Kleijnen has offered further support to Phyllis Spuls at Amsterdam. All individuals who had expressed an interest in Cochrane work were informed about the meeting. All individuals identified by searching the DARE database using the terms 'skin' and 'dermatology' were identified and circulated accordingly. Further publicity and awareness of the Group has been made possible through a funding and awareness meeting and also individual presentations such as guest lectures given by myself on the topic of 'The need for systematic reviews in dermatology' given at the international Skin Forum Meeting in Cardiff, October 1996, and at the Annual Meeting of the British Association of Dermatologists (Harrogate 1997), and various meetings attended by Gordon Searles (Canada) and Phyllis Spuls (Amsterdam). Further publicity to the Cochrane Skin Group has been highlighted in a chapter for a recent textbook on dermatoepidemiology and in an article on evidence based dermatology published in the *International Journal of Dermatology* (1997; 36: 17-22).
- b. **Scope** - The scope of the prospective skin group has a clear focus on prevention and treatment of skin diseases. Although there was some interest in a separate Cochrane skin cancer group forming in Australia at some stage, this has not been forthcoming. It was agreed at our exploratory meeting that our prospective Cochrane Skin Group would act as a kind of 'foster parent' for any individuals wishing to take the initiative in forming a review related to skin cancer. Dr Jan Bouwes Bavinck from the Netherlands and Dr Ian Harvey (Bristol) have a particular interest in non-melanoma skin cancer. Other individuals have since approached us with an interest in melanoma reviews. All those interested in skin cancer are welcome to work within the Cochrane Skin Group and to liaise with the Cochrane Cancer Network over relevant issues. At our last meeting, it was also the wish of the Group to include reviews of over-the-counter preparations and cosmetics which might be used to treat skin diseases.

Members of the prospective Cochrane Skin Group are clear that reviews relate to the primary prevention, treatment and prevention of disabilities of skin diseases. A provisional topic list is enclosed in the minutes of the second meeting of the prospective Cochrane Skin Group. Over 20 reviewers have made a commitment to be involved in such reviews. Potential duplication with other groups such as the Cochrane Wounds Group, the Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group, the Cochrane Menstrual Disorders Group, the Cochrane Musculoskeletal Diseases Group, the Cochrane Airways Group, the Cochrane Pain, Palliative and Supportive Care Group, the Cochrane Peripheral Vascular Diseases Group, Cochrane Tobacco Addiction Group and the Cochrane Infectious Diseases Group have been considered. All of the relevant administrators/co-ordinating editors have been contacted by me, and we now regularly keep each other informed about areas of potential overlap. We also help each other with refereeing work such as the recent review on scabies by those interested in parasitic diseases within the Cochrane Infectious Diseases Group.

- c. **Editorial base** - An editorial base has been established at the University of Nottingham with myself as co-ordinating editor and Alain Li Wan Po as co-editor/statistical advisor. Other members of the editorial board include Luigi Naldi (Italy), Thomas Diepgen (Germany), and Dédé Murrell (Australia). The editorial team is realistic about the time that will need to be invested in the group to ensure its success. Letters of support from editors are enclosed. Each of the editors is involved in preparing and maintaining at least one Cochrane review. Some have attended workshops at their local Cochrane centres. A co-ordinator will be appointed in October 1997.
- d. **Collaborators** - A list of those that have written to me with the intent of helping to produce specific reviews and others who have written to me wishing to be kept informed for the time being is enclosed with this application. Other key individuals, such as Professor Terence Ryan (Oxford), Professor Rod Hay (Guys and St Thomas Hospital, London), Professor Peter Friedman (Liverpool) and Professor Bill Cunliffe (Leeds) have agreed to act as external peer reviewers for Cochrane reviews pertinent to their fields of interest.
- e. **Specialised register** - Plans for establishing a specialised register for dermatology trials is certainly in progress but I have found it difficult to find the time to prepare and maintain this database myself without any additional help. I have performed some electronic search strategies on the Medline database, and these were outlined at the exploratory meeting, Thomas Diepgen (Germany) has kindly agreed to co-ordinate electronic searching. Until a co-ordinator is appointed, I will co-ordinate hand searching activities in collaboration with the Baltimore Cochrane Center, and a plan of hand searching activities is included in the draft module enclosed. A collection of all papers and relevant reports will be held at the editorial base, and we will provide copies of relevant articles to reviewers as and when they need them.
- f. **Funding** - A firm response on infrastructure has just materialised through Professor Kent Woods, Director of Research & Development, Trent Regional Health Authority. This commitment will take us to the end of the next financial year when Professor Woods believes there will be a national scheme to support Cochrane entities with a UK coordinating base. Opportunities for funding research fellows for specific reviews may be forthcoming in the next round of NHS R&D calls for reviews on treatments for eczema and psoriasis. The teams at Nottingham and Manchester have both submitted institutional curricula vitae in response to these calls. Both groups have since been invited to submit specific proposals to these calls. Professor Chris Griffiths and Robert Chalmers at Manchester University have been successful in gaining funding for a part time clinical psychologist to handsearch two dermatology journals and to produce a systematic review of treatments for guttate and palmoplantar pustular psoriasis. Fay Crawford (York) has also been successful in gaining a grant from the Welsh Office for a systematic review of treatments for common foot infections, such as tinea pedis. It is still unclear whether dermatological pharmaceutical companies will contribute to any form of corporate funding managed by the Skin Care Campaign.

- g. **Targets for the group** - Targets for the group have been set as outlined in the minutes of the 2nd Prospective Cochrane Skin Group Meeting (enclosed). We anticipate that our co-ordinator will be in post by December 1997. We estimate that around 20 reviews will be produced in the first 5 years, and that our first review will be available December 1997. We anticipate around 4 protocols to be available for the CDSR by October 1997 and 10 by September 1998. We estimate that retrospective handsearching will take us at least 5 years, bearing in mind that there are at least 104 specialised dermatology journals. We estimate that retrospective electronic searches will take us less than one year.
- h. **Appropriate documentation** - A provisional module for CDSR and letters of support from my four co-editors and Iain Chalmers are enclosed.

Closing remarks

I feel we have a group of enthusiastic individuals genuinely interested in preparing and maintaining systematic reviews in dermatology. The group is truly international and multi disciplinary. Involvement from consumer and patient representatives has been a very strong feature right from the outset of this group, and we think that we will be able to maintain this strong presence throughout the group's existence. We plan to hold our next Cochrane Skin Group meeting on 19/20 June 1998. Like others working in the Cochrane Collaboration, our ultimate aim is to produce high quality reviews of dermatological health care that address questions which are important to patients and their carers. We hope that the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group will support our application to formally register the prospective Cochrane Skin Group.

Yours sincerely

Dr Hywel C Williams MSc FRCP PhD
Co-ordinating Editor of the Prospective Cochrane Skin Group

enclosures:

- Appendix A: Provisional module for the CDSR
- Appendix B: Letters of support from co-editors
- Appendix C: Prospective Cochrane Skin Group Contact List
- Appendix D: Minutes of the Second Prospective Cochrane Skin Group Meeting
- Appendix E: Minutes of the Exploratory Meeting
- Appendix F: Report of the Funding/Awareness Meeting.