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[O32] Identifying systematic reviews on related topics: can we do more to help readers?

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Abstract

Background: The growing number of Cochrane reviews, whilst very welcome, has created new challenges. Multiple systematic reviews on the same topic are now commonplace, and in a manner analogous to the reporting of randomized controlled trials, there is an onus on reviewers to indicate how their review relates to other systematic reviews. Cochrane reviews should be no exception to this. Another important issue raised by increasing numbers of Cochrane reviews is their linkage, with several discussions about the need for overviews at past Colloquia. This is the focus of this abstract.

Objectives:

- To capture the difficulties associated with creating overviews of systematic reviews;

- To identify ways in which overviews might be made easier;

- To consider whether such manoeuvres might also help readers to make better links between related reviews, particularly within the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

Methods: All systematic reviews relevant to transfusion medicine have been identified. The principle source was The Cochrane Library 2004. Overviews of systematic reviews focusing on the areas of transfusion practice identified by the "Handbook of Transfusion" have been conducted over the past two years. The problems arising have been documented. The validity of the observations will be tested on experienced reviewers not part of the original overview team, who will be challenged with the same collections of reviews. Consensus about possible ways to overcome problems will also be examined.

Results: Five overviews have been completed, each containing over 15 systematic reviews; validation of problems and potential solutions arising from these is in progress. An interesting emergent issue concerned limitations associated with question definition, an area on which Cochrane reviews have placed considerable emphasis. Exploring this in depth will be a priority.

Conclusions: Validation will be complete by October 2006.