



How can Consumers help the Cochrane Skin Group?

There are many ways that consumers, users of the health services, can help the Cochrane Skin Group. Some of these ways are listed below:

◆ **Choosing topics for a systematic review**

Consumers can participate in the initial stage of deciding on a topic and framing the questions to be considered in the review. In this way the topics chosen will be relevant and of interest to patients and families, and not limited to those that are of interest solely to researchers and doctors.

◆ **Writing protocols and undertaking the systematic review**

Reviews are usually produced by a multi-disciplinary team and consumers are encouraged to be part of this team. The Cochrane Collaboration has evolved a standardised method of carrying out an unbiased review, and provides free workshops on how to formulate protocols and conduct the review process.

◆ **Refereeing protocols and reviews**

Consumers can also assist by critically assessing (refereeing) the protocols and reviews before they are submitted for publication. This will ensure that the outcome measures adopted in a review include those that are important to consumers, and to patients and their families. When consumers act as referees to protocols and reviews, they will be asked to focus on specific issues and questions. They do not have to comment on the technical content of the review if they do not wish to. An essential role for consumers is to ensure that our reviews are written in the kind of language that makes them accessible and meaningful to non-technical people, consumers, and patients.

◆ **Handsearching**

To minimise bias, reviews must consider all the evidence that there is, ie the results of all the trials that have been carried out. However, at present, searching electronic databases only identifies about 50% of known trials. Many trials are published in journals that are not abstracted into the main bibliographic databases. Others are published in non-English language journals. To ensure that all trials and all sources of the evidence are covered the following tasks need to be undertaken:

- page by page handsearching of the literature to find all the published trials (we offer training and support).
- translating trials from other languages into English.

◆ **General administrative tasks**

The group has very little administrative support and so offers of help with tasks ranging from newsletter design to data input are always gratefully received!

We welcome and encourage the involvement of consumers in all aspects of the work of the Group. Whilst we can not offer payment for work undertaken we can reimburse expenses incurred and acknowledge those involved when reviews are published in the Cochrane Library.