

Workshop
XIV COCHRANE COLLOQUIUM
DUBLIN, IRELAND
23 – 26 October 2006

Workshop Title: Handsearching Online Journals – Do We Need New Rules?

Facilitator(s): Roberta W. Scherer, Ann Ervin

Why is it so important that this workshop takes place? The Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions 4.2.5 states that “Handsearching involves a manual page-by-page examination of the entire contents of a journal issue to identify all eligible reports of trials, whether they appear in articles, abstracts, news columns, editorials, letters or other text. “ (Chapter 5.1.2). However, many libraries have replaced subscriptions to paper journals with online subscriptions. Handsearching an online journal may be different from handsearching a paper-based journal. In accessing online journal issues, one may need to go through multiple menus or open Adobe Acrobat.pdf files to reach the actual articles. After reaching the article, one must then scroll through the article to decide whether to classify it as a randomized controlled trial or controlled clinical trial. Since the mechanism to review a single article is different from leafing through a paper journal, it is not clear whether handsearching instructions in the Handbook should be modified.

Topic: Handsearching Online Journals

Objective: To discuss with other handsearchers the differences and similarities of handsearching online journals compared with handsearching paper journals.

Summary:

The objectives of the workshop are to:

- Collect data regarding the current experience of handsearchers with respect to handsearching online journals
- Determine aspects of handsearching online journals that differ from handsearching paper-based journals
- Initiate discussions as to whether and how the instructions on handsearching in the Handbook should be modified

We will ask participants to handsearch an online journal before coming to the workshop and complete a survey describing their experience. In the survey, we will also ask participants to provide details of usual online handsearching activities, and identify perceived advantages and disadvantages of online handsearching compared with handsearching paper-based journals. We will ask workshop participants to note specific methods employed during the online search process. During the workshop, faculty will present the results of the survey and discuss how online searching differs from handsearching paper-based journals, illustrated with specific examples from online journals. Participants will then be divided into small groups (each with a faculty facilitator). Faculty will provide a list of topics specific to online handsearching (based on the survey findings) for further discussion. Each small group will compile a list of guidelines/instructions for possible inclusion in the Handbook and present them to the entire group for discussion.