Cochrane

An official Cochrane Policy, dated 22 October 2019

This policy acts as Cochrane's Code of Conduct.

1. Introduction

Cochrane's mission is to promote evidence-informed health decision-making by producing high-quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews and other synthesized research evidence. Our work is internationally recognized as the benchmark for high-quality information about the effectiveness of health care.

It is essential that all our members working around the world understand the shared values of the organization, and the key principles that promote a collegial environment, effective collaboration and minimize the risk of damaging conflict. This policy lays out these principles and describes the kinds of behaviour expected of everyone interacting with the organization, and those that will not be tolerated. These will apply most directly to Cochrane members, but should be understood by anyone else, who, though not members, undertake work for Cochrane.

These principles should not be seen as a way of suppressing dissent and debate, both of which are essential for a thriving organization to learn and develop. On the contrary, they should provide a framework to encourage cooperative and effective working practices, to allow safe and constructive discussion of controversial issues, and to protect the wellbeing of individuals and the reputation of Cochrane.

2. The Context

This policy should be seen in relation to other current Cochrane policies. It does not aim to replace them but to complement them in describing specific expectations of conduct. It helps all contributors to understand the importance of preserving collegiality while recognising socio-cultural, gendered, spiritual and ecological contexts that add richness to the work of the collaboration.

The culture across Cochrane as a global leader in evidence-based health care is one of the strengths that attracts people who want to contribute. To preserve and further develop our culture, the following 10 organizational principles are core guidance for how we aim to be known internationally:

1. **Collaboration** by fostering global co-operation, teamwork, and open and transparent communication and decision-making.
2. **Building on the enthusiasm of individuals** by involving, supporting and training people of different skills and backgrounds.
3. **Avoiding duplication of effort** by good management, co-ordination and effective internal communications to maximize economy of effort.
4. **Minimizing bias** through a variety of approaches such as scientific rigour, ensuring broad participation, and avoiding conflicts of interest.
5. **Keeping up-to-date** by a commitment to ensure that Cochrane reviews are maintained through identification and incorporation of new evidence.
6. **Striving for relevance** by promoting the assessment of health questions using outcomes that matter to people making choices in health and health care.
7. **Promoting access** by wide dissemination of our outputs, taking advantage of strategic alliances, and by promoting appropriate access models and delivery solutions to meet the needs of users worldwide.
8. **Ensuring quality** by applying advances in methodology, developing systems for quality improvement, and being open and responsive to criticism.
9. **Continuity** by ensuring that responsibility for reviews, editorial processes, and key functions is maintained and renewed.
10. **Enabling wide participation** in our work by reducing barriers to contributing and by encouraging diversity.

The Cochrane Charter of Good Management Practice outlines the expectations of all those in managerial roles throughout the organization and is based on the following principles:

- Adherence at all times to behaviour and decision-making in accord with Cochrane's [mission and principles](#).
- Working to the highest standards of excellence in order to deliver quality products and services to our users, partners, and other stakeholders.
- A commitment to providing these products and services with the highest degree of efficiency, innovation, and effectiveness to provide maximum impact on health decision-making.
- A commitment to transparency, openness, and accountability in our relationships, communication, and actions.
- Promoting regular participation in a spirit of mutual respect, inclusivity and co-operation.
- Embracing the diversity of thought and perspective represented by all Cochrane

members; and encouraging employees and collaborators to offer and use all their knowledge, skills, and experience.

Expectations of behaviour

The following should not be seen as comprehensive, but as examples of the standards of personal and professional behaviour that would clearly be expected of someone who is contributing to Cochrane in any formal or informal capacity. They should also be understood to be part of the organization's ethos.

The terms Integrity, Respect and Accountability have specific definitions in different legal jurisdictions, the following are broad, inclusive descriptions that promote collegiality and collaboration.

Integrity:

- When involved in any Cochrane activity protect and preserve collegiality and Cochrane's reputation.
- Always act in the best interests of Cochrane.
- Maintain high professional and research standards in respect of:
    - Cochrane's research methods and operational procedures;
    - any other personal professional standards and obligations;
    - regulations of one's employing organization (e.g. university, hospital or another employer); and
    - understanding the limits of one's knowledge and expertise and seeking training as required.
- Maintain financial probity in respect of the use of any grants from Cochrane or for Cochrane activity from external sources of funding.
- Make declarations of any relevant interests, both financial and non-financial, in accordance with Cochrane's policies, if the role specifically requires it (e.g. authors, editors, Board members). These declarations should be updated when necessary.

Respect:

- Treat all colleagues both inside and outside of Cochrane, with appropriate respect and consideration.
- Maintain an appropriate relationship with those whom you manage or mentor, ensuring that they can work safely and effectively, and develop their skills and knowledge.
- Ensure that colleagues work in an environment free from harassment and bullying.

- All managers should adhere to the Charter of Good Management Practice.
- Criticism within academic debate should target ideas not people or organizational identity (critique of ideas is not a negative behavior).
    - Academic debate, open discussion and reasoned dissent about science or policy is encouraged through internal Cochrane channels or through established public media.
    - Open criticism of Cochrane or of colleagues should only be made after careful consideration and ideally with the prior knowledge of those involved.
- Maintain confidentiality as required both in research and in dealings with colleagues.

Accountability:

- Allow research, professional and managerial actions, personal behaviour at work, and any financial responsibilities to be open to appropriate external scrutiny.
- Accept responsibility for the quality of personal research outputs, managerial work, and other work on behalf of Cochrane.

3. Unacceptable behaviours

Academic debate, differences of opinion and critique of organizational policy or practice do not constitute unacceptable behaviours where the focus is on ideas rather than individuals or organizational identity. Unacceptable behaviours are generally characterized below. The terms harassment, bullying and victimization have specific definitions in different legal jurisdictions, and the following are broad definitions of which notice should be taken.

Harassment is an overarching term that includes bullying and victimization. A person subjects another to harassment when one behaves towards the other in a way that:
- appears hostile or (passive) aggressive;
- intimidates, degrades, humiliates or offends them;
- discriminates based on specific personal characteristics (such as sex, race, religion); and
- includes unwelcome sexual comments or advances.

Bullying is when an individual or a group of people in a position of power or authority repeatedly and intentionally behave to another person or group of people so that they feel that they are being harassed, and that they are unable to respond or believe that responding would be personally or professionally detrimental.

Victimization is when one person acts in a way towards another that unfairly and directly causes them physical, mental or professional harm or detriment.

All these behaviours are unacceptable in Cochrane and anyone observing or experiencing them should, whenever possible, deal with the issue through their local resources. If this is not possible or ineffective, they can take the matter further through [Cochrane's Complaints Procedure](#).