Rejection of Cochrane Reviews

Policy

In this policy, “Cochrane Review” refers to protocols for Cochrane Reviews, Cochrane Reviews, and Cochrane Reviews that are being updated. For definitions relating to this policy, please click here.

The Cochrane Review Group’s (CRG) Co-ordinating Editor(s) can reject a Cochrane Review at any stage before publication (including unpublished protocols, unpublished Cochrane Reviews, and Cochrane Reviews that are being updated). Authors should note:

- Registration of a new title or drafting of the protocol for a Cochrane Review by a specific author team does not guarantee publication for that team. Publication of a protocol does not guarantee authorship or publication of the subsequent review; and publication of a Cochrane Review does not guarantee authorship or publication of an updated version.
- Authors are free to submit elsewhere a Cochrane Review that has been rejected on the condition that no reference is made to the manuscript being a Cochrane Review.
- A CRG has the right to register and publish a Cochrane Review on the same topic as a rejected Cochrane Review with a different author team.

Decision to reject a Cochrane Review

A Co-ordinating Editor’s decision to reject a Cochrane Review is usually based upon one or more of the following reasons: poor quality; agreed timelines not met; evidence that the author team lacks the core competencies to complete the review; concerns about conflicts of interest or other aspects of publication ethics.

Table 1 illustrates some common reasons for rejection.

Table 1. Examples of criteria for a decision to reject a Cochrane Review

Quality

- Authors do not comply with the MECIR standards or other standards set by the CRG
- Authors do not adhere to Cochrane’s editorial policies, including conflicts of interest, plagiarism, and co-publication
- A serious problem with the content is identified and confirmed by an editor
The CRG identified concerns with the review development process which are not satisfactorily addressed by the authors responsible for the review.

**Timeliness**

- Authors cannot comply with agreed editorial timelines, and there is no reasonable explanation for the delay.

**Competence**

- Authors require a level of support from the CRG that far exceeds the available CRG resource (further to the initial assessment made at the review proposal stage).
- Authors do not provide adequate responses to feedback from the CRG, including to peer reviewer comments and requests for progress reports.

**Research and publication ethics**

- There is an unresolved published “Expression of Concern” about the previously published version (e.g. protocol if a review, review if an update).
- Authors have not declared relevant competing interests, or declare competing interests that contravene Cochrane’s conflict of interest policy.
- Contravenes Cochrane’s plagiarism policy.

**Rights in Cochrane Reviews rejected before publication**
Authors’ rights

If a Cochrane Review is rejected before publication, the authors’ rights in the unpublished review are unchanged, and the authors can use the content elsewhere (such as for publication in a journal, or for research purposes), on the condition that no reference is made to the manuscript being a Cochrane Review. If the update or review is based largely upon work by a previous author team, please contact the CEU (ceu@cochrane.org) for advice.

Cochrane’s rights

Cochrane will retain a copy of the rejected Cochrane Review for archival purposes. The CRG may allocate the title to an alternative author team, who will generally start afresh with a new protocol. Please see the Cochrane authorship and contributorship policy for further information.

Appeal

Any disagreement with the decision to reject will be considered according to the Cochrane appeals policy and process.

Guidance

Further guidance on managing the rejection process for CRGs is available here.

Rejection of Cochrane Reviews: guidance for CRGs

Guidance on implementing policy (for editorial teams)

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CRG actions

The CRG website must link to the Cochrane policy on rejecting Cochrane Reviews.

Decision process

Two CRG Editors (including the Co-ordinating Editor or delegate) must agree the decision to reject the Cochrane Review.

The Cochrane Editorial Unit (CEU@Cochrane.org) can screen individual Cochrane Reviews to aid the CRG’s decision-making process, if required, but in most cases this will not be necessary.
Notify authors

The Managing Editor (ME), or their delegate, must notify the author team (including all co-authors) of the Editors’ decision to reject the Cochrane Review. The correspondence should include the detailed reasons for the decision, including a written report for Cochrane Reviews and updates of Cochrane Reviews, and a link to Cochrane’s policy on rejecting Cochrane Reviews.

Notify Editor in Chief

When the CRG rejects a draft Cochrane Review before publication, the ME, or their delegate, must forward the decision email to the Editor in Chief (CEU@Cochrane.org), with the subject line “Rejection of a Cochrane Review” providing the review title, CD number, authors and review stage (protocol/review/update), if not included in the original email.

Recording the decision in Archie

The editorial decisions that led to the rejection of the protocol or review must be recorded in the Notes tab of the protocol/review’s Properties sheet. Notes should be as factual as possible, recording what has occurred and the actions taken (if appropriate), as opposed to judgmental. Information on different types of ‘notes’ in Archie, including who can see your notes, is available here.

If the protocol/review was rejected for reasons specific to the Author team, then a factual Note should also be added to the Properties sheet of the relevant person records in Archie.

For an unpublished protocol

- On the General tab, change the Write Phase to Editorial.
- Create a new Administrative note, using the Note Type: Editorial Management, to record the reason(s) that led to the rejection of the protocol.
- Move the rejected protocol to the Inactive section of the Vacant titles folder in Archie (or follow your usual CRG procedure for filing the rejected protocol).
- Consider de-registering the title.

For an unpublished Cochrane Review or an unpublished update of a Cochrane Review

- On the General tab, change the Write Phase to Editorial.
- On the History tab, revert back to the last published version of the protocol (if draft review versions have been checked in) or the last published version of the review (if draft updated review versions have been checked in).
- Create a new Administrative note, using the Note Type: Editorial Management, to record the reason(s) that led to the rejection of the review. This should be a concise, factual description of what preceded the decision to reject, referencing the workflow for further details, if appropriate.
- If the Protocol of the rejected draft Review is to be withdrawn (refer to the policy for withdrawing Cochrane Reviews), change the Stage back to Protocol and the Status of the
rejected draft Review to Withdrawn. The rejected draft Review will be moved automatically to the Withdrawn section of the Protocols folder in Archie.

- Consider making the unpublished Cochrane Review/update of a Cochrane Review available to a new author team.

**Rejection policy definitions**

**Deregistration**: Titles of Cochrane Reviews that are registered by the CRG may be deregistered, for example, due to insufficient progress by the author team. When a title is deregistered the original author team do not draft the protocol for the Cochrane Review and the title may be allocated to an alternative author team.

**Rejection**: draft (unpublished) Cochrane reviews, protocols for Cochrane Reviews, and updates of Cochrane Reviews may be rejected by the CRG at any point before publication, for the reasons described in the policy on the [rejection of Cochrane Reviews](#).

**Withdrawal**: published Cochrane reviews, protocols for Cochrane Reviews, and updates of Cochrane Reviews may be withdrawn from publication, for the reasons described in the policy on [withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews](#). This is equivalent to a retraction in journal publishing.