

Best practice guidance for reporting on Specialised Register maintenance

Background

Cochrane review groups (CRGs) have a mandatory requirement to keep a comprehensive specialised trials register, unless they have been granted an exemption by Cochrane's Editor-in-Chief, on the advice of the Cochrane Information Specialists' Executive. This requirement is a part of the Collaboration agreement, which is the basis of a CRG's relationship with Cochrane (read the Collaboration Agreement in full at this link, clause 1.2.11 relates to specialised registers):

<https://community.cochrane.org/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/Collaboration%20Agreement-POST-WEBINAR.pdf>

The register should consist of randomised controlled trials which fall within the scope of the review group (including studies or reports of studies included in Cochrane reviews). If eligible for inclusion, these studies should be submitted to the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL).

In order for CRGs to maintain transparency over how specialised registers are compiled, the CIS Support Team has produced this best practice guidance on how and where to report information relating to maintenance of a specialised register. The guidance is designed to help Cochrane Information Specialists to comply with reporting standards on the replicability, reproducibility and transparency of study retrieval; in particular the Methodological Expectations of Cochrane Intervention Reviews ([MECIR](#)).

The guidance was produced by the Cochrane Information Specialist Support Team in January 2019. It has been approved by the Cochrane Information Specialists' Executive.

Guidance

1. Information about how the specialised register is compiled and maintained should be publicly available on the CRG website.
2. The information should include the following details:
 - Which studies or reports of studies are eligible for inclusion;

- The databases searched, and the database provider;
 - Who is responsible for identifying trials and maintaining the register;
 - How the register can be accessed (e.g. via CENTRAL, or through the Group's information specialist);
 - The frequency with which databases are searched;
 - Full search strategies for each database, including legacy search strategies with dates if available;
 - If searching of a database is no longer undertaken, this information should be included, along with the date of the last search and the reasons for stopping the search;
 - The software used for maintaining the register;
 - Who screens the retrieved references for inclusion, and how this is done, including a description of how machine learning tools are used, and from what date (if applicable);
 - If handsearching is undertaken, the journals or conference proceedings that are searched should be listed, with the dates covered by the search;
 - If journal table of contents alerts are used, the abstracting service and journals should be clearly stated;
 - If the register is study-based (i.e. if related references are grouped or linked together, and/or meta-data is extracted), the steps involved should be detailed;
 - If the specialised register is the only resource searched for the group's reviews, this should be stated, along with details of any evaluations completed to ensure the register's comprehensiveness;
 - How retraction notices and retracted articles are dealt with.
3. A link to the information on the website should be provided in any Cochrane protocol, review or update which has utilised a specialised register search.
4. If the CRG has been granted an exemption from maintaining a specialised register, this should be stated on the website, along with the reasons that the exemption was granted.

Examples

- Cochrane Incontinence: <https://incontinence.cochrane.org/resources/specialised-register>
- Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth: <https://pregnancy.cochrane.org/pregnancy-and-childbirth-groups-trials-register>
- Cochrane Stroke: <http://www.dcn.ed.ac.uk/csrg/entity/searchmethods.pdf>
- Cochrane ENT: <https://ent.cochrane.org/resources/searching-studies/cochrane-ent-trials-register>
- Cochrane Kidney and Transplant: <https://kidneyandtransplant.cochrane.org/cochrane-kidney-and-transplant-specialised-register>

- Cochrane Tobacco Addiction: <https://tobacco.cochrane.org/resources/cochrane-tag-specialised-register>