The Cochrane Library User Group:
a blueprint for local feedback initiatives?

Kate Light, Julie Glanville, Alison Booth, Su Golder, Geoff Hardman, Rachel Richardson, Ian Watt,
NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York, York, United Kingdom

Introduction

The Cochrane Library is the Collaboration's main dissemination tool so it is essential that it is accessible to and usable by a wide range of potential users.

The Cochrane Library User Group (CLUG) was set up in April 2000 at the request of the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group. The aim of the CLUG is to increase use of the Cochrane Library by providing a forum for discussion of issues related to its content and use. It also disseminates news about developments with the Cochrane Library, changes in software, or the addition of new databases or features. Comments and news from the CLUG are fed back to the Cochrane Collaboration Publishing Policy Group (CCPPG).

However, there are concerns about representation. A survey in December 2000 showed that nearly half the CLUG members were based in the United Kingdom, so the CLUG Advisory Group is keen to take steps to gain a more international membership. One possibility is to encourage the formation of Local Cochrane Library User Groups (LCLUGs).

This poster describes the work of the CLUG and gives examples that can form a practical blueprint and toolkit for LCLUGs around the world.

What the international Cochrane Library User Group does

◗ Provides an electronic discussion list as a free forum for discussion of all users' experiences of the Cochrane Library and for the dissemination of news.

◗ Provides webpages as a further forum for feedback, as well as giving news of events, the results of research about use of the Cochrane Library and a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). It also hosts a collection of training materials.

http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/clug.htm

◗ Organises user days. In November 2000 the first Cochrane Library User's Day was held in London. This included workshops, guest speakers and the presentation of the Cochrane Library Prize for the most effective use of information from the Cochrane Library in practice in the United Kingdom.

◗ Seeks to expand membership.

◗ Analyses the needs and activities of its members. A questionnaire (March 2001) has provided first information about the composition of the CLUG, what searchers think of the interfaces they use and what users wanted from the group (see box).

Why start a local Cochrane Library User Group?

If the Cochrane Library itself is a universal product, why do we need LCLUGs? Like electricity, the content of the library is the same the world over but different countries may have different interfaces or connection issues, and of course, operate in different languages.

Local user groups can act as adapter plugs – channelling content to and from the international CLUG and increasing ownership of the product, especially by those who use languages other than English. LCLUGs also provide local context as it can be difficult for a small central group such as the CLUG (which has limited funding) to provide both universal and local solutions. As use of the Cochrane Library spreads and people develop local access and local interfaces, LCLUGs could supplement the main CLUG to ensure all voices are heard.

CLUG future plans

◗ Build on the success of the first CLUG Day by holding further annual consultative and information giving days. The next CLUG day will take place on the 27th November 2001 in London.

◗ Add a list of ongoing user problems and potential solutions to the website.

◗ Encourage the establishment of LCLUGs. The present group is international in scope and tries to address the concerns of users all over the world, using English as the language of communication. As use of the Library increases and more people develop local access and local interfaces, we want to assist the development of local CLUGs.

Results of questionnaire

A questionnaire was circulated in March 2001 to approximately 200 members of the CLUG via the electronic mailing list. We received 58 replies. Some key points have emerged.

◗ Usage of databases related to Cochrane Collaboration involvement.

• The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, the Controlled Trials Register and Information about the Collaboration all appear to be used more frequently by people who are involved in Collaboration activities than by people who aren't.

• The Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness seems to be used most frequently by people who do not have involvement in the Collaboration.

• The Cochrane Methodology Register, The Health Technology Assessment Database and the NHS Economic Evaluation Database seem to show no pattern of differential use by people in terms of their involvement with the Collaboration.

• Lower usage of databases such as these may indicate a need for more publicity about their content and value.

◗ Training in use of Cochrane Library

• There is a higher incidence of previous training among respondents with Collaboration involvement, compared to those outside the Collaboration, but much of the training seems to have taken place over a year ago.

• Do people in the Collaboration manage to keep up to date with changes in the Cochrane Library? Do they need refresher training? The respondents were asked if they wanted more training and most replied in the negative, but the Cochrane Library is a rapidly developing product….

What a local Cochrane Library User Group could do

◗ Set up an electronic discussion list. Electronic discussion lists, if available, can be relatively cheap, simple to set up and maintain, and allow comparatively easy communication between people with Internet access regardless of geographical location. Free e-discussion lists can be set up on Yahoo Groups. http://groups.yahoo.com/.

◗ As has happened in the United Kingdom, local groups might build alliances with existing library networks as a way of getting started.

◗ Local webpages can act as a bulletin board providing information about local news and events and also acting as an advertisement for the LCLUG.

◗ Group User Days. Opportunities for people to meet and talk face to face are invaluable and can help to cement community feeling and forge useful links, as well as providing opportunities for formal and informal training. Holding a small meeting at a larger professional event might be one route into formation of a LCLUG.

◗ Feedback. To build a local network and gain feedback it may be necessary to seed discussions with questions. To reach all members consider paper (newsletters and mailshots) or telephone communication as well as electronic means.

Conclusion

Local Cochrane Library User Groups could encourage and enable wider involvement in the Cochrane Library User Group whilst providing a more international level of feedback to the Cochrane Collaboration Publishing Policy Group. The main Cochrane Library User Group can support Local Cochrane Library User Groups with advice, suggestions and web page materials.

THE UNIVERSITY of York

Kate Light
Cochrane Library Trainer
NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination
University of York
York YO10 5DD

Telephone: 01904 433656
Fax: 01904 433661
Email: kl9@york.ac.uk
http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/