

EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICINE AND THE COCHRANE REVIEW GROUP ON HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

An international network of health care professionals, researchers and consumers preparing, maintaining, and disseminating systematic reviews on the prevention and treatment of HIV infection and AIDS.

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THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTH CARE

Physicians, public health practitioners, researchers, policy makers and consumers often are presented with unmanageable amounts of information regarding the best approaches to prevention, treatment and health care delivery. Evidence-based health care seeks to address this problem by providing these individuals with the best available scientific evidence on which to base informed decisions. Central to the practice of evidence-based health care are systematic reviews, overviews that identify and synthesize the most rigorous evidence available in a way that provides a basis for rational decision making.

The availability of high quality authoritative systematic reviews can assist future prevention, policy and research efforts by highlighting effective interventions, advancing evidence-based policy, and by identifying gaps in current knowledge thereby guiding future research. The collaborative efforts of the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group aim to highlight results from the best available studies and to disseminate these findings to further the improvement of HIV prevention and care.

THE COCHRANE COLLABORATION

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international network of health care professionals, researchers and consumers whose mission is to develop, disseminate and maintain comprehensive, regularly updated systematic reviews of the best evidence from the scientific literature. A specific long-range goal of the Cochrane Collaboration is to review *all* health care interventions, which have been evaluated by randomized controlled trials and other rigorous studies, be they *published or unpublished*. The Collaboration at present is comprised of 50 review groups, which are organized around public health and medical specialties.

On-going and completed Cochrane reviews, along with an annotated bibliography of other non-Cochrane systematic reviews, a registry of randomized controlled trials and other controlled intervention studies, and information about the Cochrane Collaboration and Cochrane review groups are published electronically each quarter in *The Cochrane Library* on CD-ROM and via the Internet.

THE COCHRANE REVIEW GROUP ON HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

Established in 1997, with its editorial base at the University of California, San Francisco, the Cochrane Review Group on HIV Infection and AIDS brings together individuals from around the world who share an interest in writing, disseminating and updating systematic reviews of rigorous HIV/AIDS research. The mission of the HIV/AIDS Group is to conduct systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials and other interventions with clinical, serologic, behavioral or economic outcomes pertaining to the prevention and treatment of HIV infection and AIDS.

Affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco's AIDS Research Institute and the International AIDS Society, the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group is coordinated by an editorial team, comprised of a coordinating editor, a number of content editors, a consumer editor, a criticism editor and the Group coordinator. Other members of the Group include reviewers (who write and update the systematic reviews), peer referees (individuals not involved with the systematic review who offer editorial suggestions prior to publication), journal hand searchers (individuals searching AIDS specialty journals, abstract books and conference proceedings for trials), consumers (individuals infected and affected

with HIV/AIDS and/or utilizing HIV prevention services), clinicians and health care workers utilizing HIV/AIDS research and other interested individuals or organizations.

The primary responsibilities of the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group include:

- Identification and assembly of a specialized registry of all trials and controlled studies within the scope of the Group.
- Preparation and maintenance of systematic reviews.
- Preparation of quarterly submissions for the Cochrane Library consisting of planned and completed systematic reviews and information about the HIV/AIDS Group.
- Dissemination of reviews produced by the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group and information about the Cochrane Collaboration and the Cochrane HIV/AIDS Group.

LINKAGES BETWEEN THE COCHRANE HIV/AIDS GROUP AND DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL AIDS GROUPS

In order to develop reviews that reflect high priority areas, the HIV/AIDS Group has developed relationships with a variety of United States- and international-based AIDS Groups including, CDC, USAID, UNAIDS, WHO, Population Council and the U.S. National Institute of Health.

Specific requests for evidence-based reviews:

- What are the most effective HIV prevention and treatment interventions targeting the developing world?
 - Population Council provided funding for a review of condom effectiveness
 - WHO provided funding for reviews of male circumcision, microbicides, and perinatal HIV transmission
- What are effective HIV prevention strategies in U.S. populations disproportionately affected by HIV?
 - U.S. Office of Minority Health provided funding for a review on HIV behavioral prevention among U.S. minority populations.
- Requests from clinicians for easily accessible, cost-effective and updated overviews of treatment options for HIV/AIDS-related illnesses.
- Requests from consumers for effectiveness and limitations of therapies.

EXAMPLES OF TOPICS UNDER REVIEW WITHIN THE COCHRANE REVIEW GROUP ON HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

Behavioral, Social, and Policy Prevention

- Interventions to modify sexual risk behaviors for preventing HIV infection among various populations
- Interventions for improving condom use in people at risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- Syringe exchange and pharmacy sales of sterile injection equipment for preventing HIV infection
- Mass media interventions for preventing HIV infection in developing countries
- Interventions for preventing HIV infection in young people in developing countries

Biomedical Prevention

- Condoms for reducing heterosexually transmitted HIV
- Male circumcision for prevention of heterosexual transmission of HIV in adult males
- Population-based interventions for reducing sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection
- Vaginal microbicides for preventing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- Interventions for preventing perinatal transmission

Therapeutics, Diagnostics and Prognostics

- Combivir for treatment of HIV/AIDS
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- Hydroxyurea for the treatment of HIV
 - Antimicrobials for preventing and treating oropharyngeal infections in persons infected with HIV/AIDS
 - Discontinuation of prophylaxis for opportunistic infections with highly active antiretroviral therapy
 - Use of antibiotics for prophylaxis of opportunistic infections in HIV infected people in the developing world
 - Influenza immunizations in people with HIV/AIDS

Health Services

- Highly active antiretroviral therapy and quality of life
 - Interventions to improve adherence to treatments
 - Provider training and education for clinicians treating HIV infected individuals
 - Nutritional interventions to reduce morbidity and mortality in HIV-infected children and adults
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HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE

- ♦ By preparing or assisting with the preparation of a systematic review.
- ♦ By peer refereeing a protocol (the outline of a proposed systematic review) and/or a completed review.
- ♦ By hand-searching a journal for randomized controlled trials - particularly those that are not listed in MEDLINE and those published in languages other than English.
- ♦ By searching abstracts books and conference proceedings for trials within the scope of the Group.
- ♦ By offering technical or other support to members of the Group.

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