A Guide to Blogging for Evidently Cochrane
Sarah Chapman   Revised September 2017

Thank you for considering writing for us! Most of our blogs feature Cochrane evidence and aim to give a short summary of the evidence in context, often with a patient or practitioner perspective.

There are two main ways in which people write for us:
- Write a whole blog
- Write a commentary to go with an evidence summary prepared by one of the Cochrane UK team. This might include personal/professional experience of the topic under discussion and reflections on the relevance and usefulness (or not) of the evidence.

We have blogs in a variety of styles, but here are some things to bear in mind in when preparing your blog. Please send it as a word document to me, sarah.chapman@cochrane.nhs.uk. I'm always happy to comment on a draft and/or outline.

A good place to start
I introduce the blogs with a sentence along the following lines:

"In this blog for [audience], [your name], [your role], looks at the latest Cochrane evidence on [topic] and asks/explores/reflects/something similar…[angle or question]."

If you work out what yours will say, it helps you establish your audience and your angle for the blog.

At this point, feel free to send this to me in an email so we know where we're going!

Length
Typically around 1000 words but up to 1500 is fine and a shorter blog is ok too.

Audience
We have a wide range of readers, including a variety of health professionals, patients/others interested in health and researchers. Each blog should be written with a primary target audience in mind. You may have been asked to write/contribute to a blog for one of our 'Evidence for Everyday' series for nurses, midwives, allied health professionals or patients.

Title & headings
A short, informative title is best, or a challenging one e.g 'Paracetamol: widely used and largely ineffective'. Starting a title with the key word or phrase helps its visibility. Feel free to suggest a title or leave it to me.

Please break up your text into short chunks, separated by subheadings, to help the reader through the text. I can help with this if you're unsure.

Starting your blog

An engaging start is important – it will draw in your readers. Some ways you could start:

- Ask a question e.g. "What are the things that you do to reduce the risk of catheter-related infection in patients with central venous catheters?" (From a blog for nurses)
- Make a bold statement or two, introducing your topic e.g. "People with pain have some very simple demands. They want the pain gone, and they want it gone now."
- Share a story/experience e.g. "I first noticed that I had some kind of skin condition in my first year of university…" "The Oxford Lunatic Asylum opened in 1826, set in ten acres of fields and woods on Headington Hill among which the inmates could wander and look at the dreaming spires below…" "How embarrassing. I arrived home from my GP appointment and fell into my husband's arms, sobbing with relief…"
- Introduce your topic and its context in a chatty way (great throughout the blog) e.g. "It seems to me that vitamin D – also known as the 'sunshine vitamin' – is very much in the limelight (or should that be sunlight?) right now."

What else?

Do give some context – why are you writing about it now (e.g. new evidence; link with an awareness event or something in the media)?

If you're summarizing a review (or other evidence), please give some brief information about the methods, main findings and the quality of the evidence.

Please follow the consistent (evidence-based!) scheme we use to talk about evidence quality, as assessed by GRADE.
High quality evidence: "Drug A reduces swelling…"
Moderate quality evidence: "Drug A probably reduces swelling…"
Low quality evidence: "Drug A may reduce swelling…"
Very low quality evidence: "It is uncertain whether drug A reduces swelling…" Or "the effect of Drug A is uncertain" or "the harms and benefits of Drug A are uncertain"

If you are contributing an expert (patient or professional) opinion or experience with a bearing on the evidence, this may occupy the majority of the blog.

It is just as important to highlight shortcomings in the evidence as strengths and good to give your perspective on it. If you'd like to see a different question asked, or have some other challenge for future research then feel free to say so. Sometimes this is well handled by the review authors and worth highlighting.

It's helpful to be clear about whether the evidence is useful, reliable etc and fine to bring in other research (Cochrane or not). We also sometimes link to interesting projects and relevant charities or support groups.

Finishing off

Consider including something along the lines of 'what next?' or 'where does this leave us?'

What do you want your readers to take away from this? You might want to reinforce a key message here, or pose a question.

Other things

Medical terms & acronyms: on first use, please give a lay explanation of a medical term and the full phase before the acronym e.g. deep vein thrombosis (DVT), unless this is a blog for which you'd expect the audience to be almost all clinicians.

Statistics: if your blog is explicitly aimed at researchers or clinicians then include them at your discretion but otherwise we tend to avoid anything beyond the basic numbers (no confidence intervals etc) as the majority of our blogs are aimed audiences who are unlikely to be familiar with them.

References: Please provide references, and links where possible.

Images: If you have images you'd like to use, please send them. If not, we will find some.

Author photo and bio: if you haven't blogged for us before, please supply a photo of yourself and a short biography for display below your blog. If you're on Twitter please include your Twitter handle.

Conflict of interest declaration: Please complete the form, which we will send you.

Publication: we'll let you know when the blog will be published and will send you a notification email with a link when it is published. All our blogs are offered to the British Medical Journal for them to publish, if they wish, on their blog also.

Thank you.