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OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOR *THE COCHRANE LIBRARY*

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Submitted to Steering Group: Feb 22 2010

Purpose

This document outlines the purpose, remit, composition and operating principles for an Oversight Committee for the Cochrane Library.

Urgency

High.

Access

5. This is an open access paper.

Background

During the process of selection of an Editor in Chief, the selection committee discussed the need for an Oversight Committee as a means of ensuring editorial independence, and to improve accountability of the Editor in Chief. The committee was also felt to be a way to resolve disputes that may arise between the Editor in Chief and CCSG, which are not resolved by initial discussion between the parties.

The committee felt that it was important to establish an Oversight Committee, but suggested waiting until the new Editor in Chief was in post and able to participate in discussions about the details of how the committee would be composed and how it would operate.

A paper recommending the formation of an Oversight Committee for The Cochrane Library was presented to the Steering Group in Vedbaek and the formation of the committee was approved in principle, with a request for additional details about the composition and working of the group. A draft paper outlining these issues was discussed at the January 26, 2010 Executive conference call and several suggestions for revision and clarification were made. This paper presents recommendations about these additional details, incorporating the suggestions from the Executive call.

Richard Smith has been invited to become the initial chair of the Oversight Committee and has agreed to do so.

(This section is an excerpt of the background paper presented in Vedbaek)

As noted in a recent WAME policy statement, "Editors-in-Chief and the owners of their journals both want the journals to succeed but they have different roles. The editors-in-chief's primary responsibilities are to inform and educate readers, with attention to the accuracy and importance of journal articles, and to protect and strengthen the integrity and quality of the journal and its processes. Owners (whether professional associations or for-profit companies) support the core values and policies of their organization and are ultimately responsible for all aspects of publishing the journal, including its staff, budget, and business policies. The relationship between owners and editors-in-chief should be based on mutual respect and trust, and recognition of each other's authority and responsibilities. Conflicts can damage both the intellectual integrity and reputation of the journal and its financial success."

Many journals have successfully introduced Oversight Committees to avoid the difficulties that may arise from these different roles (sometimes following highly publicised disputes between editors and boards). Roles of Oversight Committees typically include the following, to:

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- *Serve as a forum for discussion and deliberation of contentious or potentially contentious issues*
- *Provide an impartial mechanism for review of the performance of the Editor in Chief*
- *Have a major role in the case of any proposed dismissal of the Editor in Chief*

Membership of the committee typically includes individuals who are not members of the board or otherwise part of the governance structures of the owner. These individuals are typically high profile members of one of the journal's stakeholder groups.

Proposals and Discussion

The Appendix to this paper contains a detailed description of the purpose, remit, composition and operating principles of the proposed Oversight Committee. The appendix has been developed with input from Lisa Bero, Peter Tugwell, Nick Royle, David Tovey, and Richard Smith.

Summary of recommendations

Approval of the appendix for inclusion in the Cochrane Manual as a description of the Oversight Committee. Key issues outlined in the appendix document include the following:

1. A primary purpose for the committee of supporting editorial independence by providing a mechanism for avoiding or resolving disputes
2. A secondary purpose of advising the Steering Group on performance management issues concerning the Editor in Chief
3. Regular (at least annual) reports to the Steering Group from the Committee chair with interim reports as necessary.
4. Members of the Oversight Committee to be individuals with experience in scientific publication or editorial policy who are capable of independence of thought and prepared to act in the best interests of The Cochrane Library.
5. A 3 year term of membership with an extension for a further 2 years at the discretion of the chair.
6. New members to be proposed by current members of the Oversight Committee with the Steering Group and the Editor in Chief having the power of veto for any individual proposed.
7. Meetings, either by conference call or in person to be called as necessary but no less than twice per year.

Resource implications

Budget for up to two face-to-face meetings per year, with the possibility of an additional 1-2 conference calls per year. Secretariat staff time to support activities of the committee.

Impact statement

Adopting these recommendations would be an additional way for the Collaboration to show our commitment to editorial independence.

Failure to adopt the recommendations may have no immediate effect, but increases the risk of danger to the Collaboration from an irresolvable dispute between the Editor in Chief and the Steering Group.

Decision required

The Steering Group is asked to adopt the recommendations made in this paper.

Further information

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WAME policy statement on 'The Relationship Between Journal Editors-in-Chief and Owners' at <http://www.wame.org/resources/policies#independence> (accessed 2010-02-22)

CMAJ Review panel final report <http://www.cmaj.ca/pdfs/GovernanceReviewPanel.pdf> (accessed 2010-02-22)

Background paper for the CMAJ report from Dr Gilles Paquet
<http://www.gouvernance.ca/index.php?page=embed&lang=ce&embed=publications/06-15.pdf> (accessed 2010-02-22)

Talk by Dr. Richard Smith "If I were editor in chief of The Cochrane Collaboration, what would I do to improve the quality of Cochrane reviews?"
<http://resources.bmj.com/files/talks/cochranetalk.ppt> (accessed 2010-02-22)

APPENDIX - Oversight Committee for *The Cochrane Library*

Oversight Committee purpose

The primary purpose of the Oversight Committee (OC) is to support the Editor in Chief's (EiC's) editorial independence by providing a mechanism for avoiding or resolving disputes about the content of The Cochrane Library or any editorial positions taken by the EiC in respect to the library that may arise between the EiC and the Cochrane Collaboration's Steering Group, other Cochrane entities or individuals or the publisher for *The Cochrane Library*.

The secondary purpose of the OC is to give the Steering Group advice on performance management issues, by assisting in the identification of appropriate performance measures and contributing to regular performance reviews for the EiC.

The overall aim is to ensure that, through editorial independence, *The Cochrane Library* will thrive as an essential resource for those making evidence-based healthcare decisions.

Oversight Committee remit

- 1) To mediate on matters of tension between the Steering Group; editorial managers; authors; and other Cochrane Collaboration entities and individuals and the EiC as required; and to advise on matters of tension arising from external factors and pressures. Requests to the Committee to consider relevant issues may come from any source, and it will be for the Chair to decide what is relevant for the Committee.

In this role, the committee will relate to two other adjudication mechanisms already existing in the Collaboration - the Ombudsmen, whose role is to help resolve areas of conflict that arise between people or entities within The Collaboration, and the Publication Arbiters who perform a similar role in disputes concerning the publication of Cochrane reviews. The Oversight Committee will deal only with issues involving the EiC, while the Ombudsmen and Publication Arbiters will continue their current role for areas of contention or conflict involving others in the Collaboration. In cases in which this distinction is unclear, it will be the prerogative of the Chair of the Oversight Committee to decide whether or not the committee should become involved.

- 2) To provide independent, impartial advice on issues regarding performance management for the EiC, including:
 - a. Proposing to The Cochrane Collaboration's Steering Group an appropriate suite of performance measures to assist it in its function of measuring and managing effectively the EiC's performance in the role.
 - b. Discussing with the EiC appropriate measures and strategies for continuous improvement.

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- c. Reporting to the Steering Group on the EiC's performance in post, and recommending changes that could be taken by the EiC or the Steering Group to enhance the effectiveness of the EiC.
 - d. Proposing revised performance measures in the light of experience.
- 3) To advise the EiC on matters of editorial independence that he may wish to seek their opinion on.

Responsibility

The Oversight Committee is an independent body, and should develop its own policy with regard to matters such as external communications. When a recommendation is made to the Steering Group, the Steering Group, if it should choose to reject such advice, must provide a cogent rationale for the rejection.

The Oversight Committee shall report regularly to the Steering Group to keep it apprised of any issues it is deliberating. The Committee chair shall provide a formal report to the Steering Group at least annually. In addition, the chair shall make interim reports to the Steering Group or its Executive as necessary if the Committee has specific recommendations to be considered pertinent to an issue under its consideration.

Membership

Appointment of members:

- 1) Members of the Oversight Committee should be individuals with experience in scientific publication or editorial policy who are capable of independence of thought and prepared to act in the best interests of *The Cochrane Library*.
- 2) Initial members will be selected by the Steering Group and the EiC, both of whom will have the power of veto for any individual proposed.
- 3) Subsequent members will be proposed by the members of the Oversight Committee. The Steering Group and the EiC will have the power of veto for any individual proposed.
- 4) Members will serve a single term of three years, with extension for a further two years at the discretion of the Chair.

The membership structure will be as follows:

- 5) Chair who must be selected by the members from among their number (the initial Chair will be appointed by the Steering Group, but stand for re-election after one year)
- 6) Deputy Chair who must be selected by the members from among their number (the initial Deputy Chair will be appointed by the Steering Group, but stand for re-election after one year)

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- 7) Up to six additional members
- 8) The EiC

The Oversight Committee will be quorate with the following members in attendance:-

- 1) Chair
- 2) Deputy Chair
- 3) Two additional members

Oversight Committee meetings

The Oversight Committee will meet as required to conduct the business that arises, and no less than twice a year. Meetings will usually be by remote conferencing facility, but face-to-face meetings may be organised to deal with particularly contentious or difficult issues. Funding for meetings and conference calls will be provided by the Collaboration.

Submission of papers

Papers for the Oversight Committee should be with secretariat (in electronic format) no later than two weeks before the meeting date.

Tabled papers should be agreed in advance with the Chair.

Secretariat

The Oversight Committee will have secretariat support as necessary from the Collaboration's Secretariat.

Declarations of interest

Members will be asked to make and allow publication of a declaration of interest using the process outlined in the Cochrane Manual for Steering Group members and to update this declaration at least annually. In addition, during Committee meetings, before any specific item for which Members have an interest, the specific declaration should be made. It will be for the Chair to assess whether the interest is of sufficient import to make it inappropriate for the Member to consider any specific issue, and should this be the case the Member will leave the room during discussion of the relevant item.

Continuous improvement

The Steering Group and Committee will reflect periodically on how well the Committee is functioning, and make changes as appropriate.