



Is a literature search in the Cochrane Library enough when preparing guidelines or systematic reviews with focus on treatment outcome?

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Background and objectives

Usually comprehensive literature searches from many different databases are conducted when preparing guidelines or health technology assessment reports. The Cochrane Library consists of six databases which include reliable high-quality information (primary and secondary information sources). In the Cochrane Library focus of the clinical information is in treatment. That is why one could presume that searching the Cochrane Library is sufficient concerning the effectiveness of treatment when preparing health technology assessment reports and guidelines.

Methods

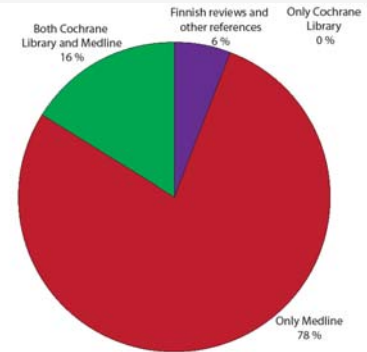
The sufficiency of the Cochrane Library will be tested by a bibliometric analysis. The literature used in three technology assessment reports, recently published by the Finnish Office for Health Technology Assessment, is studied by examining the reference lists. Our aim is to find out how many references used in the reports can be found in the Cochrane Library. We also aim to find out how many references are found in Medline but not in Cochrane. It's likely, that the results are somewhat similar in guidelines which are limited to the effectiveness of treatment.

Results and Conclusions

The results of the study are presented in figures 1–3. Only few of the references used in the HTA reports we examined were found in the Cochrane Library. The references that were found only in Medline were mostly primary studies, some of which are possibly mentioned in the reference lists of the Cochrane reviews. It is recommendable, if not even necessary, that a professional, experienced information specialist makes skillfully the information searches from several different databases in order to avoid publication bias. There are Cochrane reviews with only one author which certainly can result to publication bias.

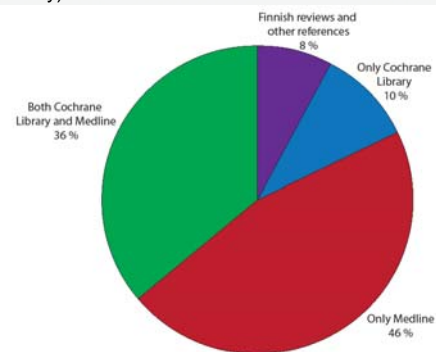
The results of this study indicate clearly that it is most important to do comprehensive searches from several different databases when preparing systematic reviews or guidelines. A good way to find out the quality of a guideline or a systematic review is to examine the search strategies and the databases used and if a professional information specialist has conducted the searches. In the near future we aim to examine how many randomized controlled trials were missing if only the Cochrane Library was searched instead of both Medline and Cochrane Library.

Figure 1. Finohta's report 32/2008. References in Medline and Cochrane.



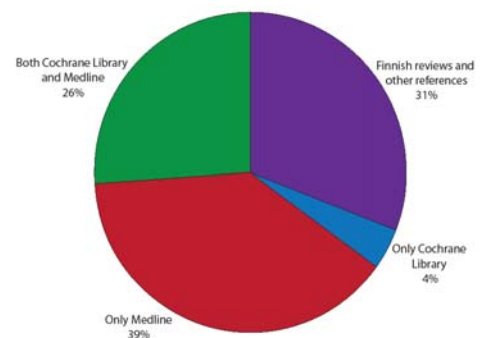
Ryynänen OP, Iiro T, Reitala J, Päive H, Malmivaara A. Effectiveness of prehospital care. A systematic review. Finohta's report 32/2008. The Finnish Office for Health Technology Assessment. Finohta/Stakes, Helsinki 2008. ISBN 978-951-33-2200-7. ISSN 1239-6273.

Figure 2. Report 16/2009 (Surgical treatment of morbid obesity). References in Medline and Cochrane.



Ikonen T, Anttila H, Gylling H et al. Surgical treatment of morbid obesity. National Institute for Health and Welfare, Report 16/2009. Helsinki 2009. ISBN 978-952-245-084-5.

Figure 3. Finohta's report 30/2007. References in Medline and Cochrane.



Anttila H, Kärki A, Rautakorpi UM and the expert group. Lymphoedema therapy in breast cancer patients. Effectiveness, current practices and costs. Finohta's report 30/2007. Finnish Office for Health Technology Assessment (Finohta)/National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health STAKES. Helsinki, Finland 2007. ISBN 978-951-33-1993-9. ISSN 1239-6273.

