# Overview of reviews: Vienna meeting 8 October 2015

### Aims of the meeting were

* To discuss key methods issues for overviews of systematic reviews. More specifically, to discuss:
  + what we know about the methods for overviews;
  + where there is uncertainty in the methods;
  + what guidance reviewers are seeking;
  + where empirical evidence is required; and
  + what research needs to be prioritised.
* Intended outcomes were to explore the potential for a group dedicated to methods research in overviews, and to promote international collaborations.

| **Topic / presenter** | **Summary** |
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| Evidence map of studies evaluating methods for conducting, interpreting, and reporting overviews of systematic reviews (Carole Lunny) | Presented the objectives, methods and preliminary results from a study that aims to develop and populate a framework of methods for overviews.   * Importance of evaluating methods * Objectives and stages of the research * Preliminary framework for search methods for overviews. |
| Methods research in overviews of reviews: overview of a research program  (Lisa Hartling) | Descriptive analysis of overviews (2000-2011). Showed considerable variation in methods and need for methodological rigour / consistency (Hartling et al PLOS One 2012). Prompted methods studies.   1. Searching for and including non-Cochrane SRs (Case study of Cochrane and non-Cochrane in four topic areas. Examined review quality, coverage, results, conclusions. Summarised trade-offs.) 2. Assessing the methodological quality of SRs (Issues relating to use of AMSTAR in overviews. Applied to 24 Cochrane and 77 non-Cochrane reviews. Summarised issues / implications.) 3. Grading the evidence based on SRs (Issues relating to use of GRADE in overviews. Applied to 111 outcomes from 77 Cochrane and 34 non-Cochrane reviews. Summarised issues / implications.)   Studies in progress   1. Scoping review of guidance for overview conduct and reporting 2. Applying ROBIS to overviews of reviews |
| Avenues for further research (Dawid Pieper) | Overviews often lack methodological rigour (Pieper et al J Clin Epi 2012). Reviewed HTA guidance – little guidance and guidance differs among agencies. Prompted methods studies.   1. Impact of choice of QA tools for SRs in overviews (Case study from an overview, 4 QA tools) 2. Up-to-dateness of reviews (Cohort of 147 overviews; examined whether authors searched for additional primary studies and explanations for not doing so. Developed recommendations.) 3. Overlapping reviews (Variably reported (60 overviews)). Proposed “corrected covered area” (CCA) method for reporting overlap; some validation and CCA method used in recent overviews.) 4. Conflict of interest in overviews (Examined how authors of Cochrane overviews dealt with their own SRs. Prevalent - potential for bias.)   Avenues for further research (not exhaustive)   * Standardised terms and definitions * Balancing the needs of different users (clinicians, consumer, policy makers) * Presenting results * Registration and database of overviews * Different objectives of overviews – different methods or one size fits all? * Reporting and quality assessment? |
| An algorithm to assign GRADE levels of evidence to comparisons within systematic reviews  (Alex Pollock) | * Developed and applied an algorithm to GRADE evidence in an overview of interventions to improve function after stroke (40 SRs, 127 comparisons). * Aimed to support more consistent and transparent use of GRADE. * Algorithm includes quality of the SR. ‘Rules’ are specific to the question. |
| Constructing an overview of systematic reviews of diagnostic test accuracy  (Harriet Hunt) | Some unique issues in overviews of SRs of DTA and empirical evidence needed on methods:   * QA tool for SRs of DTA not yet available * Guidelines needed for constructing searches * What is the value vs cost of restricting to Cochrane reviews versus considering all SRs?   What is the unit of analysis: conclusions of systematic reviews (from the SR) versus effect estimate from SR (as re-analysed by overview authors)? |
| What should we expect from overviews?  (James Thomas) | Challenges in reviewing reviews (e.g. dual layers of quality assessment; identifying and handling overlap in primary studies; out of date reviews; reviews may not present all relevant data for your overview; difficult to conduct proper synthesis; scope of reviews unlikely to match 100%)  Can be worth doing (broad questions; quick answers; fill in gaps with primary research) but:   * Quite different to systematic reviews of primary research – mediating findings, not synthesising * The type of synthesis is qualitatively different * Can give an authoritative overview of the area in question, but this cannot be guaranteed (may not be appropriate in rapidly evolving areas) * Only do them when all other options have been explored |
| Guidance for conducting overviews of reviews: an update of the Cochrane Handbook chapter  (Lisa Hartling) | Current Cochrane guidance 2008. Lots of thinking and methods since then leading to updated guidance. This presentation outlined the content of the updated guidance.   * Provides a more refined definition of overviews of reviews and Cochrane overviews * Specifies criteria for high quality Cochrane overviews * What an overview is not (overviews do not aim to simply extract and present the conclusions of the relevant systematic reviews) * Two key purposes of an overview: (1) a friendly front end that describes the current body of systematic review evidence, and (2) to address a pre-specified clinical question. * Editorial decision tree to decide whether the Overview or Intervention review format is best ([www.cmim.cochrane.org](http://www.cmim.cochrane.org)) * Including non-Cochrane reviews: advantages/disadvantages * General methods: guidance will include more detail on how to conduct an overview and additional sections (e.g. searching for primary studies, updating an overview). |
| **Discussion**: where empirical research is required, prioritisation of research, collaborations, etc. (Sue Brennan, Ricardo Fernandes) | Priorities for guidance (suggestions from group discussion)   * Typology of reasons for doing an overview of reviews and methods that address those reasons * Address uncertainties (e.g. DTA handbook) * Include examples of good practice * End user may have quite different perspectives on what the end product should look like. Think about end users: what is your question, purpose? * Considerations: including Cochrane reviews only versus broadening to include non-Cochrane * Search terms for SRs * Challenges with defining a systematic review (criteria: published? peer reviewed? narrative?) * Decision rules for when to update review evidence (when to include additional primary studies)? * Decision rules for including reviews: quality; number of trials that measure the overview outcome(s) * How to present findings:   + Narrative versus meta-analysis   + Modified vote counting (acceptable? what is the right way to do it?) * What should be in the summary of findings (SoF)? How to GRADE when no meta-analysis   Other   * Tagging and visibility of overviews in the Cochrane Library * IT: limitations of RevMan for overviews   Priorities for methods research (suggestions from group discussion)   * Updating: Approach used in guidelines may be relevant to overviews. Focused update with opportunity to make contextually relevant (e.g. to Canadian context) rather update every finding. Delphi process to help set priorities about which reviews/topics to update. * Concerns about random error when updating. * Use of core outcome sets in overviews. * GRADE: assessment of imprecision; extension for overviews (Eli Akl, and Alex Pollock)   Next steps   * Make slides available and circulate notes * People can nominate if they are interested in a particular area. Further thought required on how we take some of these research priorities forward * Guidance priorities to Handbook chapter authors |

Notes compiled by Sue Brennan. Notetakers: Sue Brennan, Lisa Hartling, Carole Lunny and Ricardo Fernandes.