

Impact of the 2009 Pilot License to *The Cochrane Library*

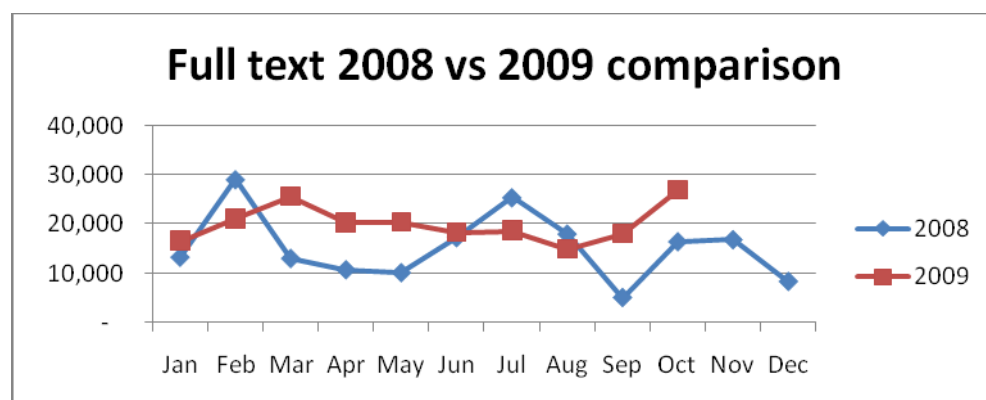
Background

The Cochrane Library is one of the most reliable sources of health information about ‘what works’ in health care and health systems interventions. *The Cochrane Library* now holds over 4,000 systematic reviews that synthesise the effectiveness of healthcare (prevention, treatment and rehabilitation) and healthcare system interventions. It is an information resource built by a global network of experts in their fields who, on a largely volunteer basis, conduct these reviews. It is the single largest source in the world of the best evidence in health care and is vital to informing health care decisions.

Prior to April 2009, approximately 10% of Canadians had access to *The Cochrane Library* through provincial, institutional or personal licences. Many providers and people in community or long-term care settings or in rural/remote areas did not have access to *The Cochrane Library*. In April 2009, funding was secured for a nine month pilot national licence that gave all Canadians ‘one click’ access to *The Cochrane Library*. Alongside the pilot project, the Pan-Canadian Cochrane License Task Force (including representatives from The Canadian Health Libraries Association, the Canadian Cochrane Centre and key subscribers) undertook an evaluation of the use and perceived value of *The Cochrane Library*. This report briefly summarises the results of the evaluation to date.

Cochrane Library Canadian Usage Trends Since ‘One-click’ Access

In Canada, in 2008, there were 54,000 instances when people attempted to download the full-text of a Cochrane review, but were denied access because they did not have a subscription. Since the pilot ‘one-click’ access for all Canadians, this has decrease to zero access denied. In fact, there has been a 27% increase in full-text downloads comparing January - October 2008 to January - October 2009 – with a total of 200,675 full-text reviews downloaded for use by Canadians between January and October this year (based on our most recent data). This is an increase of 42,000 downloaded from the January - October period for 2009 versus 2008. Without ‘one-click’ access, those 42,000 additional downloaded reviews would have cost \$ 1,260,000 if they had been purchased using the ‘pay-per-view’ option.



Cochrane Library Canadian User Survey Results

The Pan-Canadian Cochrane Library Taskforce launched a short survey on 18 October 2009. By early December, more than 1100 people had responded, with almost half leaving comments. There were more than 1,200 responses by the end of January 2010. Key results include:

- Respondents came from every province and territory of Canada, very closely proportional to the population of each
- 11% of respondents' primary language of communication was French; 89% English
- 10% of respondents said they worked in a rural health care setting, 32% in community or long-term health care, and 11% in federal or provincial government; the remainder came from institutions that likely had access previously, such as large teaching hospitals and universities
- 64% of respondents were health care professionals, 16% were in research, 12% were librarians, 8% were students, 4% were policy- and decision-makers in health and 7% were individuals, consumers or carers (respondents could choose more than one role)
- 45% of respondents did not have access to *The Cochrane Library* before the 'one-click' pilot began in 2009, and 19% weren't sure if they did
- 90% of respondents said that access to *The Cochrane Library* is very important or important to their ability to make good health care decisions
- 91% thought it was very important or important for all Canadians to have ongoing access to *The Cochrane Library*
- 88% of respondents had a level of confidence in *The Cochrane Library* such that they have recommended it to a colleague, friend or relative

In Their Own Words

In the summer of 2009, the Canadian Cochrane Centre gathered stories from users of *The Cochrane Library* to find out how they were using it and to what effect. As well, the user survey for the 'one-click' access yielded comments from over 500 respondents; the following are some comments as to why this resource should remain open and funded for *all* Canadians.

What 'regular' Canadians – making health decisions for themselves or with a loved one – had to say:

Here is Johanna's story for using Cochrane systematic reviews to help her evaluate the drugs prescribed to elders in her family: "I use Cochrane reports to aid in having conversations with health care professionals about drugs being prescribed to elders in my family. Over-medication of the elderly is a serious problem in Canada. For patients, it has serious side-effects, both mentally and physically. It also has significant implications on our health care system. Hospital admissions due to adverse drug reactions or drug interactions are extremely costly, not to mention the costs of drugs themselves! Using hard evidence in discussions with doctors helps raise credibility when questioning prescribing decisions and asking certain drugs to be removed."

In response to the one-click access survey, an individual with a health treatment question said, "Canadians need continued access to this important resource! I use it frequently to help me understand treatment options for me and my family! I cannot be the only one . . ."

Another stated: "It is very important that all Canadians continue to have this access to *The Cochrane Library*. This is one of a limited number of sites available on the internet which provides information that can be relied on to be as factual as possible. There is a lot of incorrect, inaccurate and biased information out there and it is essential that sites such as this, which can be relied on when doing health related research, continue to be available."

And another said: “Access to best information is essential for patients to make informed decisions and take responsibility for managing their health care. Informed, involved patients make good decisions and increase compliance, thus getting best results from health care resources.”

Lastly, one Canadian articulated the new culture of shared decision-making between patient and provider, saying: “I think this is a valuable tool for all Canadians and enables the public to make better decisions about their health and treatment options. Having access to this research enables us to be partners in our own health care decisions.”

What policy-makers and health care administrators had to say:

When asked how he used Cochrane evidence, a Research Officer in Newfoundland told us: “For work we synthesize existing high level research (i.e. systematic reviews, meta-analyses & HTA's) in the development of reports that are delivered to the provincial Regional Health Authorities and the Department of Health & Community Services (and other departments where relevant), as well as various other organizations including medical and allied health professional associations, school district authorities, grass-roots health promotion organizations, etc. These documents are used mostly as decision-support tools that inform health policy development and the planning and delivery of health technologies and services.” On a personal note, he added: “I also access *The Cochrane Library* for information related to infant health and care for my newly arrived daughter.”

An associate professor at a Canadian university and dental consultant for Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, said: “I was setting protocols for dental prevention programs and carrying out systematic reviews of preventive dental interventions and risk assessment in order to clarify best practice in dental care, such as frequency of brushing, teeth to involve, when to intervene, what pattern, etc. By using the most recent dental prevention studies by Marinho et al. and incorporating that with the epidemiology and level of risk of the target population—the First Nation and Inuit children—I was able to give authority to my recommendations. This way, First Nations and Inuit children will get services targeted to their level of need in the most appropriate manner in order to prevent or reduce oral diseases in this particularly vulnerable population. They will benefit much more from the new protocol which will reduce diseases, pain and suffering. This is especially important in a geographically-isolated population where access to care and treatment is difficult. Changing policy and protocols is an up-hill battle. Having sound evidence has certainly made it more convincing and easier to create new policies regarding who and when should receive certain services. It has also enabled me to not only draft new protocols but to also have them accepted.”

A health administrator stated that: “In this day and age of technology and the need for immediate access to health information, it's critical that Canadians have access to credible sources of information. As a regulatory college, we are called upon to develop evidence based practice standards for our members. Without access to *The Cochrane Library*, barrier free access to the literature was really limited. This is a huge service to both our staff and our membership-at-large. Clinical staff usually do not have time in their daily schedules dedicated to reviewing the literature. This service makes it possible for people to access relevant information, whether it be at work, or after hours at home.”

A government policy-maker implored: “Please maintain access. It is hard enough to encourage evidence informed policy. Policy makers make decisions on available information – let's make sure it is comprehensive and accessible.”

What health care professionals told us:

Jason Murdoch, a family physician in Burlington, Ontario shared his story on using Cochrane reviews when making medical decisions for his patients: “It is becoming increasingly difficult to find honest, reliable, and practical information to run my family practice. I have relied on *The Cochrane Library* to inform me what the best non-biased evidence is on many different topics. In 2007, there was a big pharmaceutical push to use Acetyl cholinesterase Inhibitors for Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). I was unsure how reliable the data was regarding the effectiveness of this treatment, so I looked up *The Cochrane Library* and the review clearly stated it was unlikely to be helpful—as I felt anyway—so I don’t typically prescribe cholinesterase inhibitors for MCI. Having avoided prescribing drugs with bad side effects and no clear benefit, I now feel that my patients are safer. Less is more!”

A family doctor stated: “Cochrane is an essential tool for the family physician. The fact that the reviews are much less influenced by the pharmaceutical industry really helps the credibility.”

A nurse said: “I think that it's important for all of us to have access to this, so we can continue to provide quality care to others and keep ourselves informed!!!”

Another family doctor felt it important to all Canadians – as well as health professionals, saying: “Fantastic resource for the public and for clinicians involved in the health care field.”

One physician in a specialty observed: “Given all the misleading health claims made in the media today, it is essential that we continue to have access to good evidence.”

And another propounded: “This is a brilliant service, and is particularly vital in rural areas without access to health sciences libraries. A truly worthy undertaking of enormous value to the general public, to patients, and to health professionals and planners everywhere. Please continue your generous support of this essential service.”

What information scientists, researchers and writers felt about ongoing access:

In response to the user survey, one librarian stated: “Wonderful. We love Cochrane - and it's such a great resource for Canadians to have access to. I hope this will continue forever. It's especially important for those of us in smaller communities who don't have other resources. Without Cochrane, too many people would rely on Google searches and use .com sites as their core info. Canadian Cochrane access gives all Canadians, wherever they live, access to the same, high quality information they deserve. Thank you!”

A medical writer and researcher really captured the value of Cochrane for patients in this information age, saying: “Cochrane provides evidenced-based information that is sorely under-represented for mainstream access. It's a great source of information to be able to use when providing healthcare information.”

Summary

Since the introduction of the national licence for *The Cochrane Library*, there has been an increase in the number of Canadians (consumers, professionals, and policy makers) using Cochrane from coast to coast to coast. The results of the survey indicate high levels of satisfaction with *The Cochrane Library* across users and strong support for the national licence to be continued. The Pan-Canadian Cochrane License Task Force is continuing to develop a business plan for this in conjunction with multiple partners.