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CONFERENCE REPORT

XI Cochrane Colloquium: Evidence Health Care and Culture

Barcelona, Spain, October 26-31, 2003

Frank Archer

The XIth Cochrane Colloquium was held in the historic and beautiful Mediterranean city of Barcelona in October 2003. The extensive program attracted over 1000 participants each linked by the bond of a desire to increase the evidence base and the use of evidence in the effectiveness of interventions in health care. The program provided a stimulating opportunity for sharing, learning and expanding the international evolution of evidence-based health care.

The seven day conference included a mixture of keynote presentations in plenary sessions, concurrent oral presentations and workshops, meetings and an extensive poster display. The formal academic program was supported by a wonderful friendly environment in which to meet new friends and network with international participants sharing common interests. The Colloquium's social program made good use of the historic nature of the city which added to the cultural enrichment and enjoyment of all participants. A particular highlight of this Colloquium was the launching of the book, "Archie Cochrane: Back to the Front". This book was specifically edited for the Barcelona Colloquium as a timely tribute to Archie Cochrane.

The plenary sessions and concurrent oral presentations addressed the primary Colloquium theme of "Evidence, Health Care and Culture". The keynote speakers represented most of the Cochrane Centres with additional experts representing particular aspects of evidence-based health care. Most plenary sessions included both formal presentations and panel discussions enabling vigorous interaction with the audience. The concurrent oral presentations addressed more specific areas of health care such as emergency and critical care, mental health, evidence and clinical practice guidelines, and, consumers and sources of information for patients. On the final day, there were five satellite workshops to make the expertise of keynote speakers more broadly available.

The Cochrane Collaboration, formed in 1993, is growing in size and activities. This Colloquium in Barcelona featured 94 separate meetings during the program. These included meetings of most of the Cochrane entities, i.e. review groups, fields, methods groups etc, some of which were closed, i.e. restricted to certain disciplines, but many were open to all participants.

A feature of this Colloquium was the inclusion of 70 workshops ranging from one to two hours in duration which were primarily designed as learning environments to cater for the interests of beginners in Cochrane activities through to those wishing to learn advanced methodologies. The workshops offered participants the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills in Cochrane publications and methodologies, for example the Cochrane Library, the Cochrane Information Management System, and the Cochrane Website. Other workshops explored methodological issues such as hand searching, undertaking a meta-analysis, and applying the outcomes of Cochrane reviews. Specific workshops addressed the needs of consumers, geographical and cultural interests, educators, quality processes, ethical dilemmas, and promoting collaboration.

As is the case with most Cochrane Colloquia, there was something of interest to keep participants busy throughout day with an enjoyable social program to relax, enjoy, network and meet new friends after the formal program.

The word "Colloquium" is taken from the Latin "Colloquium" a "conversation", meaning "a meeting or conference, especially one of a body of scholars, scientists or other specialists, on a specified subject or topic". This Colloquium certainly provided a stimulating environment for "a meeting" and attracted an extensive range of international "scholars, scientists and other specialists" willing to share and contribute to advancing, searching and distributing the effectiveness of health care interventions.

Of particular interest to this participant were the workshops on qualitative research methods, incorporating qualitative evidence into Cochrane methodologies, the meeting of Field convenors, integrating evidence into practice and the intellectual challenge to many aspects of the practice of evidence-based health care. Disappointingly, only two sessions were explicitly related to emergency care. However, the general principles and practices illuminated throughout the Colloquium can be applied to enhance emergency care both locally and internationally. Further information on the Cochrane Collaboration is available at http://www.cochrane.org/index0.htm

Perhaps the greatest relevance to emergency care was the opportunity to further advance the proposed Cochrane Field in Prehospital Care, as outlined in the editorial of this edition of JEPHC. The guidance and support received from a range of perspectives within the Cochrane Collaboration during the Barcelona Colloquium, have enhanced the process of seeking registration for this new Cochrane entity which is hoped to be achieved before the next Cochrane Colloquium to be held in Ottawa, Canada, 2-6 October 2004: http://www.colloquium.info/.

The Australian Cochrane Centre will host the 13th Cochrane Colloquium in Melbourne in October 2005. Anyone with an interest in improving outcomes from emergency health care should not miss this stimulating opportunity. Further information is available at www.cochrane.org.au (Australasian website)

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