

## EBM In Practice: The Cochrane Collaboration

*By Julia Ross*

Named for English physician Archie Cochrane, who in the 1970's called for more critical review of medical literature and increased use of randomized clinical trials (RCTs), the Cochrane Collaboration is an international effort that brings together scientists in preparing and disseminating systematic, up-to-date reviews of RCTs by specialty. The collaboration is coordinated by 13 Cochrane Centers operating in 10 countries; four of the centers are in the United States.

Using a statistical technique known as "meta-analysis," these systematic reviews distill the results of multiple studies into statistical summaries, which are presented as tables to demonstrate the evidence for or against different treatment approaches for medical conditions. The databases compiled by the Cochrane Centers are published on CD-ROM and updated quarterly.

The collaborators are self-nominated groups of health professionals, methodologists and consumers who share a common interest in a particular health care problem: For example, which smoking cessation interventions are most effective? These teams, known as "collaborative review groups," divide themselves into editorial and administrative subdivisions to carry out reviews of the current literature on their topic of interest, and submit an edited module of reviews to the nearest Cochrane Center for dissemination.

Although the collaboration is only a few years old, it has already established a reputation for producing well-regarded reviews in several clinical areas. The Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group, for example, comprises 30 reviewers from seven nations. The collaboration analyzes between 200 and 300 new reports of trials every year. Cochrane groups working on topics related to cancer and cardiovascular disease are similarly comprehensive.

The Canadian Cochrane Center provides a comprehensive Web page on the work of the Cochrane Collaboration. The address is: <http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/cochrane/default.cfm>.