

Cochrane: The value of consumer participation

By: Mary Brachaniec

Hundreds of researchers, health care providers and consumers gathered to discuss how to “Bridge the Gaps” in summarizing research results and disseminating this information to health care providers and patients at the Cochrane Colloquium held in Ottawa this October. I was honoured to represent CAPA.

The Cochrane Collaboration consists of about 10,000 researchers, health care providers and consumers around the world who gather results of high quality research studies in *Systematic Reviews of the Literature*. Housed on the Internet and in the Cochrane Library, summaries of current medical research is an attainable and a valuable resource for health professionals and consumers involved in health decision-making.

An important step in ensuring the quality of Cochrane Systematic Reviews is *Peer Review* - a process where health care experts and consumers carefully examine and provide feedback on the Systematic Review before it is considered for publication. These people form part of the ***Cochrane Consumer Network*** (CCNet)

CCNET consists of over 300 consumers interested in the full range of health areas who ensure that Review questions are relevant to people requiring health care and that areas of high importance are prioritized appropriately. Consumers help identify issues most valued by them, provide a unique perspective on issues relating to ethics and weighing benefits and harms, and provide explanations of technical language and statistical analyses.

While Cochrane summaries (abstracts) are easily accessible on the Internet, complete copies of Reviews are available only to subscribers of the Cochrane Library (such as Medical Schools and Hospital Libraries). All citizens of the United Kingdom, Australia and Saskatchewan have access to the full Cochrane Library. We encourage CAPA members to contact government representatives to ask for this public health information service in their area.

The Cochrane Musculoskeletal (MSK) Review Group synthesizes research results relating to arthritis. Several CAPA members provide input to MSK reviews before publication. Ann Qualman and others have worked with Knowledge Translation Specialist, Nancy Santesso, to place over 40 Arthritis Cochrane Consumer Summaries on www.arthritis.ca.

My experience as a Consumer Peer Reviewer has been educational and empowering. Consumer input makes a difference to the final version of the Systematic Reviews with regards to readability, relevance to patients and identifying priorities for future research. I was pleased to find that the CCNet has many resources available to assist consumers such as myself.

Research is the path to understanding various types of arthritis and finding the best treatments and cures. It is important for us to stand together with our health care

providers and researchers to work towards this goal. Be informed. Get involved. Join the Cochrane Consumer network by visiting www.cochrane.org/consumers. Speak with your health team about Cochrane Reviews and Evidence Based Medicine and keep up to date with Cochrane Reviews on www.arthritis.ca and www.cochrane.org/revabstr/index.htm.

For information on joining the MSK Review Group Consumer Team contact Ann Qualman at aqualman@cyberus.ca or Nancy Santesso at santesso@uottawa.ca.