About the need of systematic reviews: How close are we to Archie Cochrane's goal?


1. What is the problem with the growing number of clinical trials?
   - Regarding to the 1st paper, possible problems are:
     o How to find the right papers in this huge amount of publications?
     o How can reviewers of manuscripts have a good overview of the important related articles?
     o Unnecessary publications are a waist of time, money, and other recourses.
   - Or does the ‘rubbish’ not exists, and are most studies relevant, and is this just the way how the scientific community works?
   - Regarding to the 2nd paper:
     o Do the authors (experts in their study) see the same problem?
     o Is a systematic review in the discussion section really better than the expert opinion?

2. What is a systematic review, and what is a good systematic review?
   - A systematic review has a clear definition of search criteria and could be replicated by others.
   - Non-systematic or narrative review is more an expert opinion.
   - Meta-analysis is a systematic review where you pool the data of the different papers to one outcome.
   - A good systematic review is one which follows the right method, and is performed by an expert in doing systematic reviews or by a junior supervised by an expert.

3. Are there separate reviews for different target groups?
   - We could imagine that different reviews are needed for different groups like researchers, healthcare professionals and patients. An example is the Plain language summary in Cochrane reviews.

4. Is writing a scientific paper art or experience (hard work)?
   - Some people are fortunate with the art of writing, but you can become a better writer by hard work and having more experience. It is positively correlated with being a good researcher.
   - Supervise inexperienced researchers in doing a systematic review by forming pairs making the decision about in- and exclusion of articles.

Ideas for further actions:
- ask individual researchers if they agree with being included in a particular systematic review
- ask the authors of the studies included in the reports of Clarke, Hopewell and Chalmers if they agree with the classification of their discussion section

Take home message:
Yordanka: ask authors about their opinion on being part of a systematic review.
Mala: systematic reviews are not everything, have a broader look and make a critical judgment about the literature. Don’t trust reviews blindly.

See reply of Lancet on Clarke et al: