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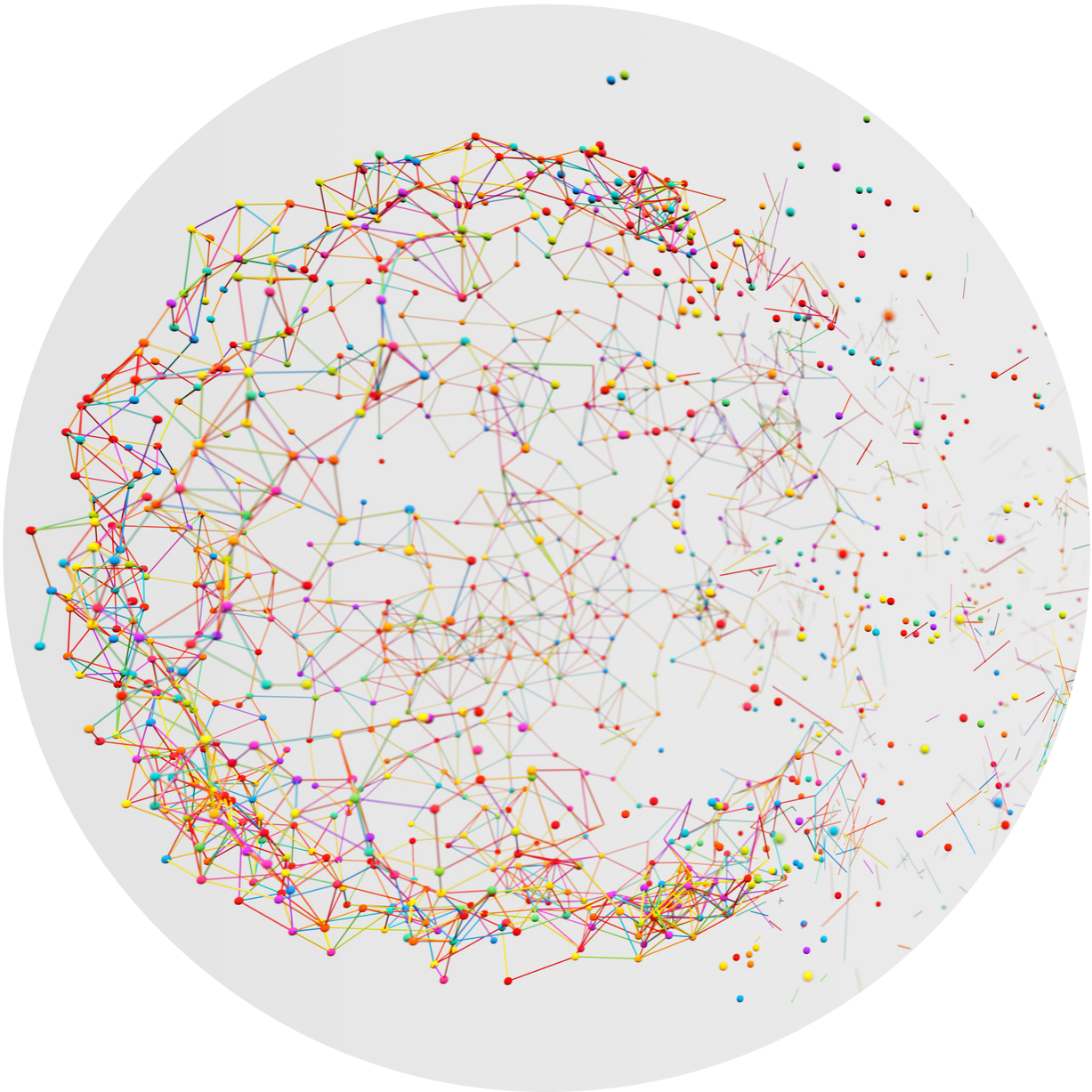

Collaborating in response to COVID-19: editorial and methods initiatives across Cochrane

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https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD202002

COVID-19 SHORT REPORT

Cochrane ENT in the COVID-19 pandemic: using our expertise and collaborating effectively

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Introduction and background

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has presented enormous challenges for healthcare systems globally. At Cochrane ENT (ent.cochrane.org) we wanted to see how we could use our particular skills and resources to assist professionals and patients in our own clinical field.

In the early months of the pandemic, clinicians were presented with a blizzard of information in the form of resources, guidance and advice statements from international organizations and societies. These related to COVID-19 and its impact on the management of patients with ENT, hearing and balance problems by ENT and audiology professionals. In Cochrane ENT we felt that we could use our information management expertise to search systematically for these resources, and to collate and structure them in an online repository that would be useful to our professional colleagues. Hopefully, more useful than a simple list of documents and hyperlinks that had randomly been identified or sent to us.

It also quickly became clear that healthcare workers at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic are at risk of infection due to repeated exposure to infected, or potentially infected, patients. Although the risk of infection may be reduced by the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), healthcare workers may be especially at risk when undertaking 'aerosol-generating procedures' (AGPs), which are common in ENT and dental practice. We identified an interest in our communities in looking at interventions to add to the use of PPE when doing AGPs.

Finally, members of Cochrane ENT identified early in the pandemic that olfactory dysfunction/anosmia (loss of sense of smell) was a cardinal and sometimes persistent symptom of COVID-19 infection.

Key activities and strategies

In April 2020, we used the expertise of our Information Specialist to begin to develop a curated repository of guidance and evidence relevant to the management of patients with ENT, hearing, and balance problems during the COVID-19 pandemic (ent.cochrane.org/news/covid-19-coronavirus-disease-ent-hearing-balance). As further evidence has become available, we have expanded and updated this resource, and we will continue to maintain it.

As anecdotal evidence began to emerge that healthcare workers were using antimicrobial mouthwashes and nasal sprays to protect themselves and their patients against COVID-19 infection, in collaboration with Cochrane Oral Health (oralhealth.cochrane.org) we prioritized, registered and fast-tracked three systematic reviews of these interventions for the prevention of COVID-19 infection.

As the pandemic has continued it has become clear that olfactory dysfunction is a common and, in some patients, persistent symptom of COVID-19 infection, with the potential to cause significant reduction in quality of life.[1] In response to a call from the UK National Institute for Health Research for research on 'COVID-19: Recovery and Learning', Cochrane ENT applied for funding to complete a set of Cochrane living systematic reviews on the prevention and treatment of post-COVID-19 anosmia. Our bid was successful and work on the fast-tracked reviews began in September 2020.

Outcomes and impact of activities

Our maintained online repository of international clinical guidance on patient care during the pandemic is a useful resource for our professional colleagues in ENT and audio-vestibular care.

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The three fast-tracked systematic reviews of antimicrobial mouthwashes and nasal sprays to protect healthcare workers and patients from COVID-19 infection, produced jointly with Cochrane Oral Health, were published in September 2020.[2-4] While we cannot yet ascertain the benefits and harms of these agents, we have identified a number of ongoing studies and we will update the reviews as the results become available. We have some concerns, from the limited information currently available, that adverse effects are not being thoroughly assessed in the current ongoing studies. We have found no planned studies addressing the important question of the use of these agents during AGPs (e.g. nasal endoscopy or routine dental treatment such as drilling/scaling). However, this is a very fast-moving area. We hope that our early comments on adverse effect reporting in the ongoing studies that we have seen will be noted and acted upon by those planning future studies.

We are working to a target date of December 2020 for completion of the first iteration of our living systematic reviews on the prevention and treatment of post-COVID-19 anosmia. Currently we are working with two patient groups on the development of a core set of outcome measures for use in the reviews and work on the protocols is underway.

Lessons for the future: sustainability and transferability

Responding nimbly to the challenge of a global healthcare crisis of direct relevance to our clinical field was a steep learning curve. However, we learned that we do have specific skills, resources and contacts within Cochrane ENT that are useful and can be deployed, and that with flexibility we can divert resources away from other work to achieve this. Working in close collaboration with Cochrane Oral Health on the three jointly produced Cochrane reviews was a genuine pleasure and an experience that we would be keen to repeat with other groups. As most of the senior editorial staff from the two Cochrane Review Groups co-authored these reviews, this work was greatly facilitated by the editorial support of the Senior Editor and Associate Editor of the Cochrane Musculoskeletal, Oral, Skin and Sensory network. We believe that this is a good example of the potential for collaborative working within a Cochrane Network. This collaboration was also facilitated by the Cochrane Central Executive Team, who developed the functionality to allow the first full 'joint' publication in the Cochrane Library of reviews by multiple Cochrane groups.

Additional resources

Cochrane ENT repository of guidance: COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) - ENT, Hearing & Balance: ent.cochrane.org/news/covid-19-coronavirus-disease-ent-hearing-balance

Fast-tracked reviews of antimicrobial mouthwashes (gargling) and nasal sprays:

- Use of antimicrobial mouthwashes (gargling) and nasal sprays by healthcare workers to protect them when treating patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD013626.pub2/full
- Antimicrobial mouthwashes (gargling) and nasal sprays administered to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection to improve patient outcomes and to protect healthcare workers treating them: cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD013627.pub2/full
- Antimicrobial mouthwashes (gargling) and nasal sprays to protect healthcare workers when undertaking aerosol-generating procedures (AGPs) on patients without suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection: cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD013628.pub2/full

Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the UK National Institute for Health Research, via Cochrane Infrastructure, Cochrane Programme Grant, or Cochrane Incentive funding to Cochrane ENT. The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Systematic Reviews Programme, NIHR, NHS or the Department of Health.

Declarations of interest

JB is the Managing Editor for Cochrane ENT. SC is the Information Specialist for Cochrane ENT. KW is a Systematic Reviewer for Cochrane ENT. MB is the Co-ordinating Editor of Cochrane ENT. The authors declare no additional interests.

Funding

Cochrane ENT receives infrastructure funding from the UK National Institute for Health Research.

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