Reviewer's report

Title: User experiences of evidence-based online resources for health professionals: User testing of The Cochrane Library

Version: 3 Date: 16 May 2008

Reviewer: Farah Magrabi

Reviewer's report:

Overall, this is a well-written paper describing a study to evaluate usability of the Cochrane Library web-site. A thorough qualitative analysis of user task performance based on a formal model of usability makes this paper conceptually very sound. In this respect few evaluations of clinical information retrieval technology employ such models. Thus the authors have done well to undertake a systematic usability study of an important online evidence resource such as the Cochrane Library.

Comments to overcome some weaknesses in reporting the methodology are as follows:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Please detail the criteria of selecting participants. The authors state that health professionals who “used the Internet and had some knowledge of systematic reviews” were selected. How was knowledge of systematic reviews assessed?

2. Include demographic details, gender, age, years of clinical/health experience of the participants?

3. Include specific details about differences between Test 1 and Test 2, i.e. what changes were made to the web site and how was the experimental protocol modified? This it will make it easier for readers to interpret some of the findings.

4. Is it likely that educators, researchers and editors of online health information were perhaps more comfortable with EBM terminology and better able to use Cochrane? Did the investigators observe differences within the group tested according to this and other variables such as years of clinical/health experience?

5. Could authors include their interview schedule as an appendix? Also, provide all details of the search tasks customised to professional interests. Were all tasks of similar complexity? How many tasks per participant?

6. Was the accuracy of task completion recorded? Is it possible to report frequency of most common mistakes and most commonly encountered problems when undertaking specific search tasks.

7. To what extent was the honeycomb model used to design the interview questions? The authors report that the honeycomb model was applied to analyse
results. It is unclear if specific questions in the interview schedule related to these categories? For example, on pg. 13 the authors state that, “when asked if they would trust the information on The Cochrane Library”. However, on pg. 22 they state that, “we could have used the model to design more specialised data collection methods…”.

8. In the discussion section, please clearly state what is novel and innovative about this study. Has usability of The Cochrane Library been previously evaluated? A comparison with previous studies of the Cochrane Library (if any), and more generally the usability of online clinical evidence/ information retrieval is recommended as this always helps readers situate the study with the context of existing literature.

Minor Essential Revisions
9. In the abstract p. 3, conclusions section check spelling “emitting”.

Discretionary Revisions
10. Include a link to the website of The Cochrane library in the references section (thecochranelibrary.com).

11. Provide details of the usability software employed to conduct the experiment.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests