

19 September 2018

**Peter C. Gøtzsche's comments on:**

**Statement from the Cochrane Governing Board about alleged bad behaviour of “one individual”**

On 17 September, a “Statement from Cochrane's Governing Board” was posted on the Cochrane.org website.<sup>1</sup> Co-chair Martin Burton read this statement aloud at the Cochrane Collaboration's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 17 September in Edinburgh.

The statement is apparently authored by the Cochrane Governing Board, but as I am one of the 7 Board members and had never heard about the statement before Burton read it aloud, the authorship is false. On 17 September, the Board members were:<sup>2</sup>

**Co-Chairs**

Martin Burton

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [martin.burton@cochrane.nhs.uk](mailto:martin.burton@cochrane.nhs.uk)

Marguerite Koster

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [marguerite.a.koster@kp.org](mailto:marguerite.a.koster@kp.org)

**Members**

Janet Clarkson

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [j.e.clarkson@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.clarkson@dundee.ac.uk)

Nicky Cullum

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [nicky.cullum@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:nicky.cullum@manchester.ac.uk)

Gladys Faba

[Candidate Statement](#)

[Curriculum Vitae](#)

Email: [gfbeaumont03@gmail.com](mailto:gfbeaumont03@gmail.com)

Peter C. Gøtzsche

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [pcg@cochrane.dk](mailto:pcg@cochrane.dk)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cochrane.org/news/statement-cochranes-governing-board>

<sup>2</sup> <https://community.cochrane.org/organizational-info/people/governing-board/membership>

Tracey Howe

[Candidate Statement](#)

Email: [proftraceyhowe@gmail.com](mailto:proftraceyhowe@gmail.com)

The co-chairs are Martin Burton and Marguerite Koster. Today, I wrote an email to the Board:

*The Statement from Cochrane's Governing Board is on Cochrane.org:*

<https://www.cochrane.org/news/statement-cochranes-governing-board>

*The statement is apparently authored by the Cochrane Governing Board, but as I am one of the 7 Board members and had never heard about the statement before Burton read it aloud at the Annual General Meeting on 17 September, the authorship is false.*

*This is a serious violation of publishing rules. I therefore wish to know, immediately:*

*Who wrote the first draft of this statement?*

*Who subsequently read it and approved it?*

*Are there other people than me who are false authors of the statement?*

*I also request that you immediately append your statement with an apology, explaining what happened, who wrote the draft, and which persons are authors of the statement. You might also consider apologizing for the many untrue statements you made about "an individual", me, and about the four members who resigned. You write:*

*Four Board members chose to resign and have actively disseminated an incomplete and misleading account of events. At the same time, others contributed to a public and media campaign of misinformation.*

*Resignation was the only honourable thing to do, and the four honourable members did not disseminate a misleading account of events. This accusation is outrageous, which can be seen by reading their statement:*

*Edinburgh, September 15, 2018*

***Dear Cochrane Colleagues,***

*This week, the Cochrane Governing Board decided with a vote of 6 in favour, 5 opposed, and one abstention, to expel Peter Gotzsche from his membership in Cochrane because he has been "causing disrepute" to Cochrane.*

*Four of us who opposed this decision have resigned from the Board as a result. We consider the Boards use of its authority to expel Peter from Cochrane to be disproportionate. The general public, consumers, students, and researchers involved in Cochrane value the plurality of opinions, views, and perspectives Cochrane has worked hard to give voice to since its foundation. We believe that the expulsion of inconvenient members from the Collaboration goes against Cochrane ethos and neither reflects its founding spirit nor promotes the Collaborations best interests. We are concerned that these actions might cause great damage to the reputation of the Collaboration.*

*Governing Board members are expected to publicly uphold and defend all decisions taken. We could not adhere to this obligation in this case in good conscience. We also believe that those of you, who placed your*

*trust in us to represent you on the Board, would not wish us to do so. For this reason, we have unfortunately felt the need to resign from the Cochrane Governing Board and have done so the day after the decision was taken.*

*It is our hope and deepest desire that this event will encourage all Cochrane members and the wider community to reflect upon where we currently find ourselves and give serious consideration to what we want for the future of Cochrane and its principles, objectives, and ethos.*

*Gerald Gartlehner, David Hammerstein, Joerg Meerpohl, Nancy Santesso*

The statement is about “the behaviour of one individual.” It is clear, from a flurry of articles in the last few days about the moral downfall of Cochrane caused by its current leadership, e.g. in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine,<sup>3</sup> Science,<sup>4</sup> Nature,<sup>5</sup> and BMJ,<sup>6</sup> that this individual is me.

At a meeting on 13 September, the Board expelled me from the Board for no legitimate reason, as far as I can see, in a process that can best be described as a show trial where the verdict was prefabricated and the process was flawed. I am still a member of the Governing Board because I can appeal the Board’s decision till 20 September.

The Cochrane statement is strongly defamatory for me and also strongly misleading, which serves to underline that Cochrane is in free moral fall under its current leadership. In Cochrane, we are proud that we base our decisions on the best available evidence, but this was neither the case at the Board meeting on 13 September, nor in the statement, which misrepresents the evidence. I shall explain this now, quoting from the “Statement from the Cochrane Governing Board.”

1. “We wanted to behave fairly and with integrity, in a process that respected the privacy of an individual.”

I was not subjected to a fair and due process when the Board expelled me on 13 September, which caused four board members to resign in protest the next day: Nancy Santesso (Canada), Joerg Meerpohl (Germany), Gerald Gartlehner (Austria) and David Hammerstein (Spain).

With its defamatory and unsubstantiated allegations, and by reading the statement aloud at the AGM, the Board has not respected “the privacy of an individual.”

2. “This is about the behaviour of one individual. There has been a lengthy investigation into repeated bad behaviour over many years.”

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<sup>3</sup> Maryanne Demasi. Cochrane – A sinking ship? 16 September 2018.

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmjebmspotlight/2018/09/16/cochrane-a-sinking-ship/>

<sup>4</sup> Martin Enserink. Evidence-based medicine group in turmoil after expulsion of co-founder. 16 September 2018.

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/09/evidence-based-medicine-group-turmoil-after-expulsion-co-founder>

<sup>5</sup> Inga Vesper. Mass resignation guts board of prestigious Cochrane Collaboration. 17 September 2017.

[https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06727-](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06727-0?utm_source=twit_nnc&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=naturenews&sf197859021=1)

[0?utm\\_source=twit\\_nnc&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=naturenews&sf197859021=1](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06727-0?utm_source=twit_nnc&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=naturenews&sf197859021=1)

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Hawkes. Cochrane director’s expulsion results in four board members resigning. 17 September 2017. BMJ 2018;362:k3945 doi: 10.1136/bmj.k3945

Jos Verbeek asked twice at the AGM what the alleged “bad behaviour” was about. He did not receive a meaningful reply. “Bad behaviour” was not an issue in the show trial I was exposed to, which ended with two allegations:

That I should have breached the Trustee Code of Conduct (I was never told in what way, and Cochrane’s appointed lawyer did not conclude this, see below), and that my membership of the Cochrane Collaboration would be terminated in accordance with clause 5.2.1 of The Articles of Association of The Cochrane Collaboration, which means being “guilty of conduct which has had or is likely to have a serious adverse effect on the Charity or bring the Charity or any or all of the members or Directors into disrepute.”

There seems to be a moving target here. Was I expelled because of bringing the Charity into disrepute or because of unspecified “bad behaviour”?

The so-called lengthy investigation was not at all lengthy but was carried out in a haste. At a meeting held on 13 June 2018, the Cochrane Governing Board decided to appoint independent legal Counsel to carry out a review to assist the Board with the resolution of governance issues. The issues concern disagreements in interpreting the Cochrane Spokesperson Policy and involve a Trustee of Cochrane, who is also the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre (Peter C. Gøtzsche), and Cochrane’s CEO (Mark Wilson). Cochrane’s law firm that handles this case is Harbottle & Lewis LLP.

According to “Instructions to Counsel” from 2 July 2018, the complaints Gøtzsche and Wilson have raised against each other should be subject to a formal consideration and legal review, and Counsel is asked to establish the facts; identify the legal basis of the issues in dispute; and make recommendations in order to try and find a resolution amenable to all parties involved.

From Cochrane’s law firm, I received documents related to the disagreements in a binder of about 400 pages. It is not clear who assembled these documents. As I showed in my report to Cochrane’s law firm,<sup>7</sup> they are a seriously biased selection that favours Wilson and disfavors me. Further, they contain many inaccuracies and misleading statements, and I was initially given only 8 days to respond to this, a monumental task, with no legal assistance. Among the allegations raised against me is that I should have “breached” codes at times when the codes were not even in place.

I mentioned in my report to Counsel that some events mentioned in the 400 pages occurred in 2003 when a Spokesperson Policy did not exist. A policy, introduced in 2015, cannot be applied retrospectively. Therefore, the allegations should be readily dismissed, but I nonetheless rejected all the allegations in the binder and therefore do not understand what the alleged bad behaviour should be about. Counsel agreed with me that it was inappropriate to go back 15 years in time:<sup>8</sup>

*“my view is that all these events are historic and the parties resolved them at the time, or decided to let them lie. I do not believe that it serves any useful purpose to go over this old ground, other than to consider whether they support PG’s [Peter Gøtzsche] complaint that they demonstrate that MW [Mark Wilson] is antagonistic towards him etc. Further: (1) I am not sure whether it would fair on PG*

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<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Gøtzsche. Disagreements in interpreting the Cochrane Spokesperson Policy. 30 August 2018

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Grant QC, Maitland Chambers, Lincoln’s Inn, London. Re The Cochrane Collaboration: Preliminary report on certain complaints/issues: 12 September 2018.

*to come to conclusions on matters which lie in the past; and (2) in any event I do not have time to deal with these issues in the time constraints imposed upon me.”*

Counsel, in his 38-page report, did not at any point conclude that I should have brought the Cochrane Collaboration into disrepute, and I documented in my report to Counsel that, in fact, I have contributed substantially during 25 years to the good reputation Cochrane has. In contrast, it is abundantly clear that Cochrane’s current leadership has harmed the Charity, in fact hugely, because of its unjustified and unjust actions against me.

3. “Four Board members chose to resign and have actively disseminated an incomplete and misleading account of events. At the same time, others contributed to a public and media campaign of misinformation.”

As stated just above, the four honourable members did not disseminate a misleading account of events. This accusation is outrageous, which can be seen by reading their statement.

I do not know what is meant by “a public and media campaign of misinformation.” It suffices to say that others may not agree.

4. “To act in the best interests of Cochrane.” If the Board had been serious about this, they would not have expelled me from Cochrane for no legitimate reason (see also below) and they would not have published their seriously misleading and defamatory statement and presented it in a speech at the AGM.

5. “We cannot tell you everything. All of you will understand why individuals have a right to privacy and confidentiality. We ask that you all respect this.”

The Board does not tell people everything and what they tell is highly misleading. This is exactly how the pharmaceutical industry operates. Further, they broke my right to privacy and confidentiality by publishing their statement.

6. “As the Board, we are in fact the employers of the Cochrane staff. All our staff, and our members, have the right to do their work without harassment and personal attacks. We are living in a world where behaviours that cause pain and misery to people, are being ‘called out’. This Board wants to be clear that while we are Trustees of this organization, we will have a “zero tolerance” policy for repeated, seriously bad behaviour. There is a critical need for ALL organizations to look after their staff and members; once repeated, seriously bad behaviour had been recognized, doing nothing was NOT an option.”

The way Burton gave his speech at the AGM sounded to the audience like a hate speech, with undue emphasis on words such as “zero tolerance” (it can be heard on YouTube later). I felt it was a public execution of me. The insinuations are clear. Since the statement is about “the behaviour of one individual,” the Board alleges that I should have harassed and personally attacked Cochrane staff. This is not true and there is no support in Counsel’s report for such allegations. In contrast, I give many examples of the opposite in my report, and document that I have been harassed and personally attacked, often in the most disrespectful way, by Cochrane’s CEO and his staff. The Board is supposed to govern the CEO, and therefore to have “zero tolerance” when the CEO bullies people.

This bullying includes an incident in Lisboa in March, during a Board meeting, which I described in my report to Counsel (names of Board members removed by me, in this publicly available letter). These are my personal notes, written immediately after the event:

*I said that I did not feel I had broken this policy, to which Mark said that I had admitted two days earlier that I had broken the policy. I explained that this was not the case; I had just said that xx and I interpreted the policy differently to Mark. Mark totally lost his temper. He shouted, called me a liar and said that I couldn't be trusted because I changed my views all the time. Mark pointed his finger at me and hammered his hand very hard on the table and took yy firmly by the shoulder and said something like: You were there so you can confirm that Peter admitted he had broken the policy. Yy said that he could not remember anything to that effect. There were other witnesses to this episode, e.g. zz who later the same day told me that she considering intervening, as what she saw looked very disturbing.*

The Board was fully aware of this incident, which other Board members witnessed, and which we spent some time on discussing, but the Board did nothing to discipline the CEO and he did not apologize for his intimidation of me. We can all lose our temper, and the only reason I tell about this incident is that it so clearly illustrates that, although the motto for the Edinburgh Colloquium was "Cochrane for all," and although we talk a lot about equity, some are more equal than others, as George Orwell wrote in *Animal Farm*. Nothing happens to Wilson in relation to his occasional bad behaviour, but my alleged bad behaviour, of which I am not aware and for which I have not seen any documentation, led to my expulsion from the Board and from Cochrane.

I document in this letter that the Board is not honest about the facts in relation to its expulsion of me. I therefore need to pre-empt an episode that I am afraid Burton might use against me, as he has certainly not pulled any punches so far.

At the Board meeting on 13 September that ended with my expulsion, co-chair Koster gave me five minutes to defend myself and interrupted me already after 30 seconds. After I was asked to leave the room, the Board deliberated for six hours. During the morning session, when lunchtime was approaching, I knocked on the door and asked Burton for permission to get my jacket, which he granted me. After five hours of waiting, where neither Burton nor Koster spoke to me, even though we met in the coffee and lunch room several times, and in the corridor, I knocked on the door again in order to tell the Board that I was leaving and that it would therefore take some time before I could come back in case the Board needed my presence.

This time Burton was highly tense and aggressive. I assume it was because he had been unsuccessful so far with convincing the Board that it should expel me. So, it was likely the worst possible moment that I disturbed him. Without even asking why I knocked on the door, he exclaimed: "You cannot come in here!" and he also tried to block the door physically, with his foot and arms. I am a good deal bigger than Burton. I reacted instinctively and pushed him gently aside and delivered my message and left. Burton shouted: "He pushed me!" Then he postulated that he had red marks on his arm and asked for ice, and a Board member who has always been very hostile towards me asked if they should call the police, although I had already left. All of this was absurd amateur theatre, obviously with the aim of finding something they could use to expel me, as they had not found anything after all these hours of discussion. The Board used my spontaneity against me already the same evening when the co-chairs sent an email where they explained I had been expelled: "Given your behaviour today, we must also ask on behalf of the Governing Board that you do not try and attend any other Governing Board meetings." My "behaviour" was that I was polite enough to want

to tell the Board I would not be easily available, and that I insisted on doing this despite Burton's aggressiveness. One of my researchers witnessed these events. I asked her whether I should disturb the Board and we both felt it was the right thing to do after five hours with no contact.

7. "So, here are the facts as we are able to report them. We may be able to tell you more later, we may not. Time will tell.

This Board decision is **not** about freedom of speech.

It is **not** about scientific debate.

It is **not** about tolerance of dissent.

It is **not** about someone being unable to criticize a Cochrane Review."

This is not how others see it. Mark Wilson's repeated bullying of me, using his own Spokesperson Policy as his "weapon," which I documented at length in my report, is seen by many as a thinly veiled attempt at scientific censorship and accommodating the drug industry's interests. Counsel did not find that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy, and Wilson recently exonerated a person from his own staff, although he had done precisely what Wilson does not accept when I do it: He published personal views in an editorial about the Cochrane review of the HPV vaccines without a disclaimer that these are not the views of Cochrane as an organisation.<sup>9</sup> Some are more equal than others. I had asked Burton to send out a small document about the HPV vaccines where Wilson and Cochrane's Editor in Chief, David Tovey, had exonerated their employee, as this was very important evidence for my defence. Burton did not do this.

The reactions from the Cochrane leadership to our scientifically justified criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccines review,<sup>10</sup> which we have just updated and sharpened,<sup>11</sup> clearly illustrate that, contrary to policies to the contrary, our current leaders are against publishing valid scientific criticism of prestigious Cochrane reviews in the free press.

As scientists, we are free to constructively criticise science in medical journals – this is what we treasure and call academic freedom, also in Cochrane. In fact, so much that we have an annual prize for it: "Cochrane values constructive criticism of its work and publicly recognises this through the Bill Silverman Prize ... with a view to helping to improve its work, and thus achieve its aim of helping people make well-informed decisions about health care."

In accordance with this, the Spokesperson Policy, introduced in 2015, states: "Many Cochrane contributors are experts in their field and have every right to discuss their work and express their personal views – this may include expressing opinions on Cochrane policies and Cochrane Reviews. This policy is not intended to infringe Cochrane's long-standing tradition of rigorous academic and scientific debate."

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<sup>9</sup> Jo Morrison, Toby Lasserson. HPV vaccination: balancing facts. 29 June 2018.

<http://www.cochranelibrary.com/editorial/10.1002/14651858.ED000126>

<sup>10</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias. *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine* 2018; 27 July. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjebm-2018-111012>.

<sup>11</sup> Lars J Jørgensen, Peter C. Gøtzsche and Tom Jefferson. [The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias: Response to the Cochrane editors](#). Published 17 Sept 2018 in *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*.

8. "It is about a long-term pattern of behaviour that we say is totally, and utterly, at variance with the principles and governance of the Cochrane Collaboration. This is about integrity, accountability and leadership."

It is common in academic debates that people use empty *ad hominem* arguments and extreme language when they have no valid arguments. The Board uses this deplorable tactic, and its implied allegations are unsubstantiated and false to such a degree that it is serious defamation of me. People all over the world are deeply disturbed about the expulsion of me from Cochrane because they find that I am a scientist of the highest integrity. This is clear from the many articles and blogs that have been written in the last few days and from the many supporting emails I have received from some of the most respected institutions and scientists in the world. If the Board wishes to harm the reputation of Cochrane even more than it has already done, I must say that their strategy is perfectly suited to this purpose.

9. "In March this year, we received three complaints about an individual. These were not the first complaints that had ever been received. In fact, the earliest recorded goes back to 2003. Many have been dealt with over the years. Many disputes have arisen. Formal letters have been exchanged. Promises have been made. And broken. Some disputes have been resolved, some have not."

This is not correct. It was two complaints and a question sent as a tweet. In my report, I have explained that the "complaints" since 2003 were not justified, but rather a matter of the complainants trying to protect their financial or other interests. Scientists should challenge the status quo with good science, which is what I have tried to do in my long career, and this will of course lead to "complaints." This should not be seen as a problem but as a badge of honour proving that the scientist has integrity and does not try to arrive at "politically correct" results, and proving that Cochrane treasures free speech, which currently is not the case, unfortunately.

In contrast to Mark Wilson, Counsel did not find that I had breached the Spokesperson Policy related to the two recent complaints. It is very interesting what Counsel wrote about this:

*"On p.1 of the Spokesperson Policy it states that "This Policy clarifies who can represent, write and speak officially on behalf of Cochrane and how they should do it." PG might well say that this has nothing to do with what he was doing in that letter to Dr Torrey. He was not speaking or purporting to "speak officially on behalf of Cochrane" ... I do not think that PG can be clearly said to have acted in breach of the Spokesperson Policy when he wrote to Dr Torrey."*

*"My conclusion is the same in relation to the expert report and the subsequent complaint against Professor Loonen in the Dutch proceedings. PG was there plainly not speaking about "Cochrane-related issues." I do not think it can be said that he was speaking officially on behalf of Cochrane."*

*"I do not think it would be fair to hold PG in breach of a document which is not crystal clear as to what may or may not be done ... I am not sure it be would fair to censure PG."*

*"A final point on the extra constraints which were imposed on PG. In general I think it is an imperfect solution to seek to impose ad hoc requirements on individuals, although there they were very well-intentioned. The precise legal status of those requirements is unclear and their ad hoc nature gives rise to the issue which has arisen as to what was or was not agreed in Geneva."*



Thus, it is irrelevant when the Board writes that “Promises have been made. And broken. Some disputes have been resolved, some have not.” As Wilson’s *ad hoc* requirements of me, which do not apply to anyone else in Cochrane, have not been legitimate, which I have always argued they cannot be, it is misleading to allege that I should have broken promises.

The third “complaint”, which was a question, is a matter so trivial that not even Wilson was interested in punishing me for it, or in threatening to close my Nordic Cochrane Centre (see just below).

10. “It was clear to the Co-Chairs that the Board had to reach a decision about these most recent complaints. The individual then made serious allegations against one of the Senior Management Team and shared those with the Board. We seemed to be in an impossible situation.”

This is misleading, and the Board knows it is misleading. I did not raise a serious allegation. It was not an allegation but a fact. Furthermore, I needed to write to the Board, which is clear from my report to Counsel:

The subject line of the email I sent to the Board on Wednesday, 11 April 2018, copying Wilson, was: “Mark Wilson has sent a very unpleasant email today threatening to close my centre.”

“Our CEO Mark Wilson sent an email to me today, on 11 April, of 13,504 words that takes up 42 pages when transferred into a Word document, with 10 attachments. In it, he claims that I have broken the Spokesperson policy. A psychiatrist complained about me to Mark on 1 March. After having had six weeks to think about it, Mark sent me this email, which I received at 2.22 p.m. today while I was very busy working on something else, with a deadline.

Mark wants me to respond to his allegations during the next two days because he wants to reply to the complainant[s] during this time. This is not due process. I am totally occupied the next two days and cannot meet Mark’s extremely short deadline. Danish TV is filming us at the centre all day tomorrow, a bit ironically, considering the complaint, because they are very impressed with our work related to helping psychiatric patients, and Friday I shall be in Stockholm and lecture.

Most importantly, it was decided at the Governing Board only time on 23 March in Lisboa where we discussed the Spokesperson policy and issues related to it, that Mark’s allegations and my reply would need to be considered by the Board before Mark takes action, if any is required.

I therefore remind the Board about this decision and at the same time ask Mark to respect the Board’s decision. I shall respond as quickly as I can, which means next week.

Mark, in his long email, threatens to deregister my centre, if I fail to comply with the Spokesperson policy (and many other requirements, which are specific for me and do not apply to anyone else in Cochrane). I find this very disturbing. I firmly believe I comply with the policy in relation to this psychiatrist’s complaint and there cannot be separate rules for me that do not apply to others in Cochrane. Finally, it is totally out of proportion to threaten me with closing my centre, which you will see when you see my reply to Mark’s allegations. I copy Mark on this boardprivate email.”

In Wilson’s email the same day, to which I responded, he gave me a deadline of only two days: “I have attached my intended responses to Dr Torrey and to Mr Pottergard, as promised in Lisbon. If you have any comments you would like to make about them before I send them later this week then you are welcome to send those comments to me. I have already considered the points made in your draft responses you sent me on 18<sup>th</sup> March in formulating these replies.”

As the deadline was extremely short, and as Wilson was not present during our Board only time in Lisboa three weeks earlier and did not seem to know that we had decided that the Board needed to become involved in the disagreement I had with Wilson about the three complaints [actually only two, plus a question], I saw no other option than to write to the Board immediately, to stop Wilson from responding to the complainants without involving the Board.”

Counsel did not find it was wrong of me to write to the Board. The Board is pitying themselves, “We seemed to be in an impossible situation,” but this pitying is misguided.

11. “The Board approved a motion to accept the lawyer’s advice and establish the independent review.”

The Board fails to note that four Board members voted “no” to this; the same members who later resigned from the Board.

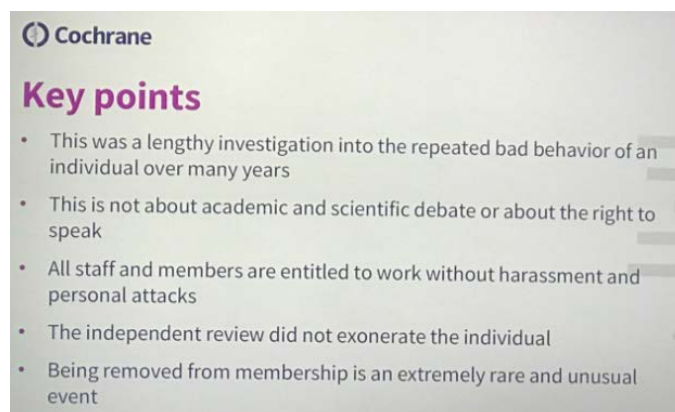
12. “So, at the Board Meeting on Thursday September 13th, the trustees reviewed the lawyer’s report of his independent review, and all the material related to the recently published paper. After they had reviewed and discussed this at length, the Trustees exercised their judgement, and looking across a broad range of behaviours, the Board came to a decision to invoke Article 5.2.1. relating to termination of membership. This was not unanimous.”

Again, although Cochrane is an open, transparent and accountable organisation, the Board does not reveal how the voting went. Only six Board members voted “yes”, one abstained, and five voted “no” (I was not allowed to vote). And the Board did not consider all the relevant material, as Burton did not send Wilson’s exoneration of this own employee to the Board despite my request.

“Looking across a broad range of behaviours” is like the Inquisition where the alleged witch was guilty beforehand, and the process was about finding examples of bad behaviour. As all people behave badly now and then, it should not be a problem to institute witch hunts on everybody. People have worried that they may become next in line to be expelled from Cochrane if they don’t follow the party line, because of its lack of due process.

### Burton’s slide at the AGM

During his speech, Burton exposed this slide:



I have clarified above that it is extremely misleading to state that, “The independent review did not exonerate the individual.” Firstly, Counsel was paid by Cochrane, which makes the affair not so “independent” perhaps. I have documented elsewhere, in an appeal I shall send to the Governing Board tomorrow, my criticism of Counsel’s report. Secondly, Counsel’s report is labelled “STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL TO THE GOVERNING BOARD AND MR MARK WILSON. NOT TO BE DISSEMINATED ANY WIDER. I would like to disseminate this report to anyone who would like to see it, but I do not dare do this with such a label unless a lawyer has advised me that I can do it without worrying about a possible law suit. I believe publishing Counsel’s report would make people realise that the allegations the Cochrane Governing Board and Wilson have raised against me were not accepted by Counsel.

I believe the Cochrane “process” I have been exposed to is Kafkaesque. I still does not know what the charges are and what I should have done wrong. The “process” constitutes miscarriage of justice, although it was semi-legal. In court cases, the accused is allowed to defend himself. Furthermore, the jurors need to agree on their verdict. Finally, if the verdict is appealed, it will not be the same judges and jurors. Not so in Cochrane where the same people will be judges a second time, apart from those who resigned in protest over the injustice the first time. This construct gives connotations to regimes we abhor. I will nevertheless appeal in order to tell more about how unfair the whole Cochrane “process” was.

Among the many failures in the Cochrane “process” is the lack of mediation, which is otherwise always recommended when conflicts occur in charities. Another failure is the lack of a totally independent Conflict Committee where people with conflicts of interest, e.g. Burton *vis a vis* Wilson, are not allowed a seat.

The founding of the Cochrane Collaboration in 1993 was one of the most important events in health care in the last century. I was one of the founding members and opened the Nordic Cochrane Centre the same year. We all treasure Cochrane, and none of us wishes to harm it. The Board, through its “bad behaviour,” which I have documented in great detail in my report to Counsel, and which everyone have been able to see with their own eyes the last few days, has caused tremendous harm to Cochrane. There is nothing wrong with Cochrane, only with its Board. The best thing the Board could do in order to act in the best interests of Cochrane would be to resign, apologize for its wrong-doing, promise the tens of thousands of Cochrane volunteers that they will never run for the Board again, and withdraw its expulsion of me from the Board and from the Cochrane Collaboration. The Board has brought the Charity into disrepute, and this will likely worsen if no honourable action is taken.

We all makes mistakes, and the more we achieve, the more mistake we will have made. In case my actions have hurt or harmed anyone, I apologize for this. I want Cochrane to prosper, which is why I became a Board member, and why I have written this letter. The Board must go.

Yours sincerely,



Peter C Gøtzsche  
Professor, Director, MD, DrMedSci, MSc  
Nordic Cochrane Centre  
Rigshospitalet, Dept 7811