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28 September 2018

To:

Cochrane's CEO, Mark Wilson  
Cochrane's Deputy CEO and Editor in Chief, David Tovey  
Cochrane's Deputy Editor in Chief, Karla Soares-Weiser

From:

Head of the Nordic Cochrane Centre, Peter C. Gøtzsche

### **Changes made to the website of the Nordic Cochrane Centre without our knowledge**

Yesterday, a journalist informed me that I no longer appear listed as a staff member of the Nordic Cochrane Centre on our website, <https://nordic.cochrane.org/> (see screen shot below). This led her to believe that I had been fired from the centre, to which I informed her, was not true.

Furthermore, the public statements which appear on the Cochrane Collaboration website, <https://www.cochrane.org/>, have also given Danish journalists the wrong impression. For example, the newspaper *Politiken* wrote on 16 September, under a photograph of me (my translation): "Professor Peter Gøtzsche has been kicked out of the research institution the Nordic Cochrane Centre at Rigshospitalet";<sup>1</sup> *Jyllands Posten* wrote on 26 September: "Peter Gøtzsche has stopped as director of a research centre";<sup>2</sup> and *BT* wrote the same day: "Peter Gøtzsche has stopped as director."<sup>3</sup>

These messages are not only blatantly false, but they are harmful for me and all my staff. I am still head of department and that department is the Nordic Cochrane Centre. The false media reports are a direct result of Cochrane's misleading public statements and I have therefore, needed to request that the newspapers correct their erroneous messages.

The Cochrane headquarters in London has taken forcible control over our website without permission or consultation. I wish to know:

**1. Who deleted me as a member of staff and why?**

**2. Why was the statement from 26 September by the Cochrane Governing Board, which is strongly misleading and defamatory for me, uploaded on the front page of our website?**

The announcement of our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium is what should have been – and until recently also was – highlighted on our front page (see screen shot below). Instead, Cochrane has effectively dismissed our achievements by posting the defamatory statement in its place.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://politiken.dk/indland/art67032>. 16 Sept 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/peter-goetzsche-faerdig-som-direktoer>. 26 Sept 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/peter-goetzsche-faerdig-som-direktoer>. 26 Sept 2018.

I have documented that the statement by the Cochrane Governing Board distorts the evidence, suppresses crucial information and propagates false and misleading information.<sup>4</sup> It is a poor reflection on Cochrane and it is immensely damaging to its reputation, as reported today in The Lancet.<sup>5</sup>

*“They have put me down as an author of a document that defames me and that I had no knowledge of before it went online”, said Gøtzsche. “That is misconduct; a speech was read about me with all kinds of unpleasant insinuations, and they invent all this stuff about bad behaviour without saying what they mean or what this bad behaviour was supposed to be.”*

*Documents uploaded to Goetzsche's personal website suggest that the complaints against him relate to his alleged violations of the Cochrane spokesperson policy. Cochrane asserts that “the report completely exonerated the member of the Senior Management Team but did not exonerate the other individual”.*

*“This is utterly false”, responds Gøtzsche. “The legal counsel cleared me of the complaints that were raised against me—to suggest otherwise is to completely misrepresent the findings of the review”.*

*Some people are beginning to question whether the board can survive. “I think we need a fresh start”, said one insider. “This whole thing has done a lot of damage to Cochrane; the only way to regain trust will be to replace the entire management board.”*

### **3. Why was our tweet column on the opening page deleted?**

Some of these tweets alerted the readers to our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review, published twice in *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*.<sup>6 7</sup> We perceive this action to be akin to scientific censorship, which goes directly against the officially declared values of the Cochrane Collaboration. As scientists, we are free to constructively criticise science in medical journals, also Cochrane reviews – this is what we treasure and call academic freedom. In fact, so much so, 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.”

### **4. Why was a comment by me about the current moral crisis in the Cochrane Collaboration deleted?**

My article, “A moral governance crisis: the growing lack of democratic collaboration and scientific pluralism in Cochrane,”<sup>8</sup> has been widely appreciated because it focuses on the essential problems in the current Cochrane leadership, which are harmful for the charity and therefore also for public health.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.deadlymedicines.dk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/G%C3%B8tzsches-comments-on-Cochrane-Statement-26-Sept.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Burki T. The Cochrane board votes to expel Peter Gøtzsche. 28 Sept 2018.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32351-1/fulltext?code=lancet-site](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32351-1/fulltext?code=lancet-site)

<sup>6</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>7</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias: Response to the Cochrane editors. 17 Sept 2018. <https://ebm.bmj.com/content/early/2018/07/27/bmjebm-2018-111012.responses#the-cochrane-hpvvaccine-review-was-incomplete-and-ignored-important-evidence-of-bias-response-to-the-cochraneeditors>.

<sup>8</sup> Gøtzsche PC. A moral governance crisis: the growing lack of democratic collaboration and scientific pluralism in

I wrote in this article, among other things: “This growing top-down authoritarian culture and an increasingly commercial business model that have been manifested within the Cochrane leadership over the past few years threaten the scientific, moral and social objectives of the organization. Many Cochrane centres have sustained negative pressure and a lack of productive dialogue with the CEO of the central office. Upon alerting the Cochrane leadership of these worrisome tendencies that negatively affect the operability and social perception of our scientific work, the Nordic Cochrane Centre has received a number of threats to its existence and financing” (our centre is financed by the Danish Government).

The fact that Cochrane headquarters has censored our website without our knowledge firmly reinforces my concerns about the Cochrane leadership and its lack of democracy. This is mismanagement and a violation of our most important principles: Collaboration and transparency.

### **5. Why did Cochrane headquarters, without our permission, remove items in the News section, which celebrate our achievements at the Nordic Cochrane Centre?**

As an example, this was removed:

[\*The Cochrane Collaboration withdraws a review on methylphenidate for adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder\*](#)

*A Cochrane systematic review on immediate-release methylphenidate for adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was withdrawn from the Cochrane Library on 26 May 2016 after substantial criticism of its methods and flawed conclusions. Retraction of scientific papers on this basis is unusual but can be necessary...*

We perform research on drugs for ADHD, including a systematic review, and our criticism of the Cochrane review played a key role for its withdrawal. We suspect this News piece was removed because the current Cochrane leadership is hostile to criticism of Cochrane reviews. Again, in order to protect the “Cochrane brand,” the leadership demonstrates that it is prepared to censor criticism, rather than support academic freedom.

### **6. Why did Cochrane headquarters remove our communication consultant’s rights to administer our website?**

Without any notice, Cochrane has blocked our communications consultant from being able to carry out administration duties on our own website. These actions by the CEO’s office violate the most important of our 10 key principles:<sup>9</sup>

*1 Collaboration, by fostering global co-operation, teamwork, and open and transparent communication and decision-making.*

The actions also violate the second principle:

*2 Building on the enthusiasm of individuals, by involving, supporting and training people of different skills and backgrounds.*

Totalitarian actions like this only serve to humiliate and demoralise our staff members at the Nordic Cochrane Centre.

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Cochrane. <http://www.deadlymedicines.dk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/G%C3%B8tzsche-Moral-crisis-in-Cochrane.pdf>.  
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cochrane.org/tl/2017/about-us/our-vision-mission-and-principles>.

Therefore, I request immediately (1) a reply to my questions (2) that our website is reverted back to its original state of 25 September (3) that my communication consultant gets her administrative rights back and that she is afforded an apology for Cochrane's careless conduct.

Yours sincerely,



Peter C Gøtzsche

### Our team

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The screenshot shows the Cochrane Nordic website. At the top left is the Cochrane Nordic logo with the tagline "Trusted evidence. Informed decisions. Better health." To the right is a search bar. Below the logo is a navigation menu with items: Our centre, Research, Courses, News, Mammography, Contact us, and Symposium 2018. The main content area features a "Cochrane News" section with a purple background image and a list of news items: "Not at the 2018 AGM?", "Edinburgh Colloquium 2018: Round-Up", "Statement from Cochrane's Governing Board - 26th September 2018", "Statement from Cochrane's Governing Board", and "An interview on consumer involvement in research with Simon Denegri, NIHR". Below this is a "Latest News and Events" section with three items: "Nordic Cochrane Centre's 25th Anniversary Symposium - Welcome 14 September 2018", "Testing Treatments is now available in Danish 20 August 2018", and "VIRKER DIN BEHANDLING?". At the bottom is a footer with the Cochrane logo and navigation links: About Cochrane, Publications, Community, and Contact us.