

15 October. Gøtzsche's comments on Governing Board letter to 31 centre directors from Spain and Latin America

[In its reply from 12 October](#), The Cochrane Governing Board writes that it is bound by UK law to follow the rules set out by the Charity Commission.

My comment: As I explain in [my complaint](#) to the Charity Commission, the Board broke these rules numerous times in its show trial against me.

The 31 Cochrane directors wrote that they did not want Cochrane *"to become an organisation that passively accepts the decisions made by its leaders ... without enough collective mechanisms for discussion, contrast and control."* The Board replies by referring to the Council and by saying that it oversees the Central Executive Team (CET).

My comment: The Board continues to ignore its member's concerns by referring them to procedures and strategically diverts from actually addressing the obvious problems. Further, the [Cochrane's CEO controls the Board](#), which means there is a serious lack of democracy and due processes in Cochrane.

"The Board has not recently received any complaints that the CET are acting counter to the Board's instructions."

My comment: This is demonstrably false. I have documented [serious mismanagement](#) on part of the CEO and his staff and it is part of the reason why Cochrane undertook this recent investigation.

"You express doubts that the process has been 'sufficiently appropriate and coherent with the principles of Cochrane'. We respectfully disagree with that suggestion. Indeed, we were diligent in following 'due process' as advised by Cochrane's legal advisors."

My comment: This is false. I was exposed to a show trial, which I and others have documented at length on www.deadlymedicines.dk. David Hammerstein, a Board member who resigned in protest over my expulsion, has [written about the process](#):

The crucifixion of Peter Gøtzsche. The whole process against Gøtzsche has been anti-democratic and none of the basic tenets of due process, fairness and transparency have been upheld. There has been no attempt at seeking outside neutral arbitration nor the use of techniques of conflict resolution with the aim of reaching a friendly agreement or even a more peaceful modus vivendi concerning disagreements. No time has been given to establish an independent committee of conflict made up of people from outside of Cochrane's the main institutions. Every step of democratic guarantees that is common in most large organizations has been ignored in this case with the objective of the rapid exclusion and tarnishing of Peter Gøtzsche. Any future independent investigation of this question should be centered on the violation of democratic processes by the CEO and the Co-chairs of the Governing Board.

"The Trustees wanted the process to be as transparent as possible while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of all those involved."

My comment: This is false. Cochrane did everything it could to keep the entire investigation "confidential" and control the public message by issuing false and misleading statements. There was no transparency at all before I released Counsel's report and other essential documents on my website. Co-chair Martin Burton's '[hate speech](#)' at the Annual General Meeting did not offer any clear explanation why I was expelled, and when asked, there was no reply. This is the opposite of transparency. Further, the two statements from the Board, from [17 September](#) and [26 September](#), were mendacious.

"The independent review was undertaken by a senior barrister ('Counsel') ... As far as the Board are concerned Counsel's report remains confidential and will not be published. Notwithstanding this, we are aware that Professor Gøtzsche has breached confidentiality and his ongoing obligations as a former Trustee by selectively publishing confidential and personal material related to this matter."

My comment: From the beginning, the Board has consistently misrepresented Counsel's report. Counsel exonerated me, but the Board has given the opposite impression. I therefore needed to make the report public so that people could judge for themselves who was right. We call this transparency. Further, the right to defend oneself against serious defamation without any substance is more important than adhering to "confidentiality." Finally, I have never signed any confidentiality agreement.

"We have been complimented on the way we have followed due process and the result. It has been disappointing to see how many people within and outside Cochrane have jumped to conclusions based on incomplete and biased information."

My comment: It is the Board that has deliberately disseminated incomplete and biased information. I have tried to correct the misinformation by publishing the documents on my website. Anyone who has complimented the Board for following due process must be unfamiliar with the laws of procedural fairness and natural justice and with these documents. The process was a show trial.

"The lack of respect for the privacy of individuals against whom the most outrageous allegations have been made has been troubling and hurtful to say the least."

My comment: The Board conveniently fails to note that I uploaded the documents that demonstrate serious mismanagement on the part of the CEO and the co-chairs of the Board **after** the Board had seriously defamed me with its mendacious allegations on 17 September at the Annual General Meeting.

"Since mid-September, Professor Gøtzsche has actively tarnished Cochrane's reputation, and continues to do so, by issuing a series of public statements on his website which have breached his obligations of confidentiality as a Trustee and continued the pattern of behaviours which led to the Board's initial decision."

My comment: It is the Board and Cochrane's CEO who, by their unjustified actions, which include scientific censorship, have tarnished Cochrane's reputation. Further, this is **not** a continuation of a pattern of behaviour before 17 September, as Counsel exonerated me from the allegations that were falsely levelled against me by Wilson. Finally, there are situations where confidentiality needs to be broken, e.g. when serious injustice has occurred, as in my case. Desmond Tutu says about this: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." I did not choose the side of the oppressor.

"Many of our members, funders and partners want Cochrane to be the sort of organization that will not accept or condone the sorts of unacceptable behaviours that Professor Gøtzsche has demonstrated over a long period and continues to do so."

My comment: This is mendacious. I have **not** demonstrated unacceptable behaviours over a long period. As a scientist who has spent a career exposing the undue influence and corruption of the pharmaceutical industry, it is not surprising that Cochrane has received complaints from industry-friendly representatives [about my critiques of science](#). Cochrane should have defended me against those undue attacks but instead, caved in to the pressure. I doubt Cochrane's funders, nor its members want Cochrane to be such a timid and gutless organisation.

"We believe that Cochrane's willingness to tackle problems of this nature are reflective of an organization that really 'lives up to its values', makes it more attractive to individuals to join and stay, and to funders to support, rather than less so."

My comment: It is tragic that the Board is out of touch, not only with its members, but with reality. Even in the face of international criticism about how it has handled this latest scandal, the Board continues to congratulate itself with blind enthusiasm.

"This is especially true of the next generation of younger people whom Cochrane seeks to attract, and who are put off by out-dated and inappropriate patterns of behaviour that may have been tolerated 20 years ago in academia but no longer."

My comment: Cochrane's CEO, Mark Wilson, has introduced scientific censorship in Cochrane. The Board mistakenly believes that this will attract young people. The opposite is true. Cochrane has demonstrated that any young person who wants to challenge vested interests and call out bad science, will not be supported by their organisation and will probably be reprimanded or expelled for not 'towing the party line'.

"We believe it is not in the charity's best interests to undertake another independent review."

My comment: As I have documented [at length](#), there never was an independent investigation, let alone any due and fair process. The 31 Cochrane directors merely asked for justice, and the Board denies them this. Cochrane Centres and Cochrane members will need to decide whether this is an organisation to which they want to belong.

"The independent review brought to light a number of deficiencies in some of our documentation, specifically the Spokesperson Policy and the Collaboration Agreements."

My comment: Since the dispute between Mark Wilson and me was about the interpretation of the Spokesperson Policy in relation to two complaints that had no substance, I should not have been expelled from Cochrane. Counsel pointed out that the Spokesperson Policy and the Collaboration Agreements were unclear (and therefore unfit for purpose), and I have pointed out that I broke neither of them. I noted in [my complaint](#) to the Charity Commission that Counsel had totally misunderstood what the Collaboration Agreement involves, and that he used guess-work, speculations and personal views as well when he interpreted Cochrane documents:

"I presume that the core functions set out in the 'Functions of Centre' document do not permit Cochrane Centres to carry out whatever research they choose to do" (this is wrong.)

Notwithstanding my conclusions above I am not sure that PG deserves censure for what I think are breaches of the Collaboration Agreement ... The philosophy of PG and the policy which MW has articulated and followed are at odds; rather than see this as a disciplinary matter it may be more constructive to treat it as a crossroads at which the Board must decide its vision for what Centres/Centre directors can and cannot do. One way or the other that vision needs, I believe, to be articulated in a clear way which provides PG (and others) with very clear guidance."

The bottom-line is that it is not clear what centres can and cannot do, which is why Counsel concluded that I should not be disciplined, but that clearer guidance for centres should be worked out. Furthermore, what I am reprimanded for doing is what all centres do. Some are more equal than others in Cochrane.

"We agree that the existing Collaboration Agreement is deficient in this respect."

My comment: Then it should not have been an argument for expelling me.

"It is important to note that some aspects of the agreement that have now been found to be deficient were introduced in 2016 at the specific request of Centre Directors, led by Professor Gøtzsche and not opposed by the Centre Directors Executive at the time."

My comment: The Board's account of this is seriously misleading. I give several examples in [my complaint](#) to the Charity Commission of Wilson's disrespectful interactions with centres, where I also describe what really happened in 2016. All the centre directors were **strongly opposed** to Mark Wilson's micromanagement of us and we agreed that we needed much more freedom than Wilson was prepared to give us. One of the issues was this one:

"Wilson told us not to misuse the 'Cochrane Brand or logo,' for example to obtain funds that were not used directly to support Cochrane activities. This meant that we could no longer apply for funding using our own letterhead, which would be harmful for Cochrane because centres often survive by obtaining funding for non-Cochrane activities. It is unbelievable how many rules Wilson has invented that are directly harmful for our charity's objectives."

My conclusion: The Board and Cochrane's CEO have disqualified themselves and harmed the Cochrane Collaboration to such a degree that the only honourable thing for them to do is to admit their injustice and other failures and resign, so that we can get the Cochrane Collaboration back to its core values.

A genuinely independent commission needs to be established to investigate what happened in relation to my expulsion from the Board and Cochrane. The CEO and the Board know perfectly well that they would not survive such an investigation, which is why they refuse to approve it. I very much hope the Charity Commission will grant my request to open a statutory inquiry. If not, I'm afraid that Cochrane will disintegrate further and ultimately disappear.