Cochrane Public Health reaches out to Europe!

Five institutions from Germany, Austria and Switzerland join forces to establish a European satellite of Cochrane Public Health with the goal of supporting and disseminating the work of Cochrane Public Health in Europe and beyond, and to strengthen European collaboration in public health research.

How should society and politics deal with the rapid increase in overweight and obesity among the general population? Can we justify mandatory vaccination against certain diseases? What regulations are required to address particulate matter air pollution? To find answers to these questions there is a need for specific research in the field of public health as well as transparent and responsible use of the resulting evidence and insights gained.

The Ludwig Maximilians University (LMU) Munich, Cochrane Austria, Cochrane Switzerland, the University of Zurich, the University of Bremen, and the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology - BIPS teamed up to strengthen and better coordinate European public health research, and thus to give a strong, evidence-based voice to important societal health issues. This initiative is supported by Cochrane Germany.

Cochrane Public Health Europe is a satellite of Cochrane Public Health situated in Melbourne, Australia, which is one of the over 50 topic-specific working groups within the international research network Cochrane. The network's central aim is to improve the scientific evidence for health system decisions, in particular through the preparation, maintenance and dissemination of systematic reviews.

Professor Dr Gerald Gartlehner, director of Cochrane Austria and head of the Department for Evidence-based Medicine and Clinical Epidemiology at the Danube University in Krems, states: "Obesity and many other public health challenges are international problems and are best tackled through international cooperation. We will implement global knowledge at the local level."

A first joint project is the web page "Cochrane Kompakt", in which plain language summaries of important reviews are translated into German and made accessible online to anyone interested. "Health information must not be left to primarily commercially motivated groups", emphasises Dr Erik von Elm, senior researcher at the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University Hospital Lausanne and co-director of Cochrane Switzerland. "Patients, relatives, or parents have the right to obtain independent and objective information about the effectiveness or potential harms of health interventions. This is what we want to achieve through Cochrane Kompakt."

"Unlike pharmaceutical interventions, public health approaches are often complex: they may involve combinations of technical, regulatory, and educational measures and must be adapted to the local circumstances", explains Dr Eva Rehfuess, senior researcher at the Institute for Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology at LMU who currently coordinates Cochrane Public Health Europe. "In order to correctly determine the effectiveness of these interventions we must have a toolkit of innovative methods. We are addressing this need together, in particular in relation to preparing systematic reviews and appraising the resulting evidence."

Professor Dr Stefan K. Lhachimi, head of the Research Group for Evidence-Based Public Health at the University of Bremen and BIPS, explains: "In order to adapt our research activities to the expectations and needs of our target group, we need to perform an 'inventory' of the most pressing public health problems. We will identify both knowledge gaps that need to be filled, as well as fields with an overload of information that require structuring. To do so we will conduct a survey among policy makers, health authorities, researchers, and patient groups in German-speaking countries."

For more information please visit the websites of Cochrane Public Health Europe or Cochrane Kompakt or contact us at cochranepublichealth@ibe.med.uni-muenchen.de