Process for dealing with submitted comments

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1. Screening

Comments submitted through the Cochrane Library are received by the Editorial and Methods Department (EMD) Comments Support team, who will act within two working days of receipt. Comments that are not about the Cochrane Review (e.g. comments about the website functionality, access, or display) or are offensive, nonsensical, spam or duplicates will be dealt with by the Comments Support team. All other comments will be sent to the Managing Editor and Feedback Editor of the relevant Cochrane Review Group (CRG).

2. Initial handling by the CRG editorial base and the Feedback Editor

The Feedback Editor assesses the comment and decides:

1. Is the comment valid (coherent, sensible, and relevant to the review)? If not, no further action is needed beyond informing the contributor of the decision.
2. Does the comment make a substantive comment on the content of the review or a minor comment?
    a. Substantive comments (see action below).
    b. Minor comment (see action below).

The Feedback Editor and the Managing Editor should agree the appropriate course of action and share this and the comment with all the review authors.

The Feedback Editor should respond promptly to the comment contributor to acknowledge receipt, thanking the contributor, and explaining what the next steps will be, with a timeline.

The review may or may not be amended or updated, or in extreme cases, withdrawn, in response to a comment.

If the comment does prompt a change to the review, the Managing Editor will make relevant changes as agreed with the review authors and the Feedback Editor. The contributor should be informed of the outcome.

3. Action: dealing with invalid comments

The Feedback Editor responds to the contributor informing them of the decision and give a brief explanation.

4. Action: dealing with minor comments

Minor comments could include spelling or typographic errors, make very general statements, or may be requests about the review or its status. Minor comments are not normally published unless the comment (or its response) offers insight or interest to readers, or an opportunity to provide useful clarification.

The Feedback Editor responds to the contributor informing them of the action taken.

It may be appropriate to thank the contributor in the Acknowledgements section of the Review.

5. Action: dealing with substantive comments

It is important that substantive comments are published as soon as possible, unless the CRG has a compelling reason not to do so, or if the contributor does not wish the comment to be published. Examples of comments that might not be published are those where it becomes apparent that the contributor is clearly mistaken, or when the CRG has a reason to believe that the contributor has a significant, undeclared conflict of interest. The Feedback Editor should raise concerns about conflict of interest with the contributor. All substantive comments should be published within three weeks after submission.

A response from the review authors is usually sought and should be published subsequently. Review authors' responses should be confined to comments about the review itself and should relate directly to the content of the comment. In some cases it may be more appropriate for one of the CRG editorial team to respond.

The key steps are:

1. Publish the Comment as soon as possible after receipt (see below).
2. Publish a response from the review author or CRG editorial team.

3. If the review needs amending as a result of the comment you can cite or acknowledge the Comment as appropriate. (See Citing comments)
4. If the comment is to be dealt with in the next update, this should be indicated in the response to the Comment.
5. Inform the Comment contributor of the outcome.

6. Publishing comments

CRGs should aim to publish substantive comments within three weeks following Comment submission.

In some cases the comment may be edited or summarized (for example if the comment is particularly long with repetitious content, or it goes outside the scope of the review being commented on) by the Feedback Editor, who will send the revised version to the comment contributor, informing them of the intention to publish the revised version. The contributor will have already consented to editing and publication of the comment when they submitted the Comment, so this is a courtesy,

A substantive Comment should be published on the Cochrane Library, and the CRG should aim to publish it within three weeks of its submission.

To publish a Comment the CRG should indicate this to the Comments Support team via the Support ticketing email. The team will then publish the Comment on the Cochrane Library, and notify about publication via the same Cochrane Support ticketing email once this is done.

When the Comment is published the comment contributor receives an automated notification.

The Comment is displayed in the ‘Read comments on this review’ section of a review on the Cochrane Library.

7. Publishing responses

Responses to the original comment should be submitted as new comments using the Commenting system from the review on the Cochrane Library, making sure to clearly indicate which Comment is being responded to; for example, by addressing the commenter and the Comment title. There will be one named author of the response as per the form filled in on the Cochrane Library. The publication process will be managed by the Comments Support team. The original commentor will not receive any automated notification about a response being published.

If the CRG is concerned about too much time elapsing before responding, they can publish a holding statement; for example, “we thank [commenter] for their comments, and the review authors will be responding in due course etc.”

If the authors do not wish to respond or are unable to respond, the CRG can respond appropriately to the comment in their place. In certain cases, the Editor in Chief or a member of the EMD may publish a response to a Comment.

8. Comments on previous versions

Comments are no longer managed in RevMan. Older comments dating from when comments were previously managed in RevMan, can be deleted from RevMan once they have been published on the Cochrane Library. The comments have their own DOI and version history; and exist independently of the review.