

Update on expulsion of Peter Goetzsche - Why we should not continue business as usual

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Jos Verbeek, Coordinating Editor

My previous statement on what happened to Peter Goetzsche was based on what the Governing Board of Cochrane stated during the Annual General Meeting on the 17th of September in Edinburgh. At that time the reasons for the expulsion were 'personal attacks and harassment' and bad behaviour. During the meeting I asked for concrete examples of the bad behaviour that made this so bad that a person should be expelled from the organisation. Martin Burton, one of the two co-chairs of the Cochrane Governing Board answered that they were still working on that. This led me to conclude that this was a workplace conflict with a lot of damaging fall-out for Cochrane. I asked for resignation of the rest of the board which would enable a fresh start.

In all their wisdom, the remaining Governing Board members have decided to stay on and govern Cochrane until the next elections. This is legally possible, but I think it is not good for Cochrane's democratic processes. The remaining Governing Board organised three webinars in which written questions could be posed. The Governing Board just maintained all previous statements about 'bad behaviour' and entrenched itself deeper into its position. Also, a request to the board from 31 Iberoamerican Center directors to revise Peter Goetzsche's case met with [a systematic 'no need to'](#). In all their statements the Governing Board has performed a methodical character assassination of Peter Goetzsche by systematically classifying him as a person with very bad behaviour. I think this is inappropriate and the reasons for expulsion should be clearly articulated, so that we can all understand what this is about. Anyone who would like to dig deeper into the correspondence between Peter Goetzsche and Cochrane can find everything on Peter's website:

www.deadlymedicines.dk.

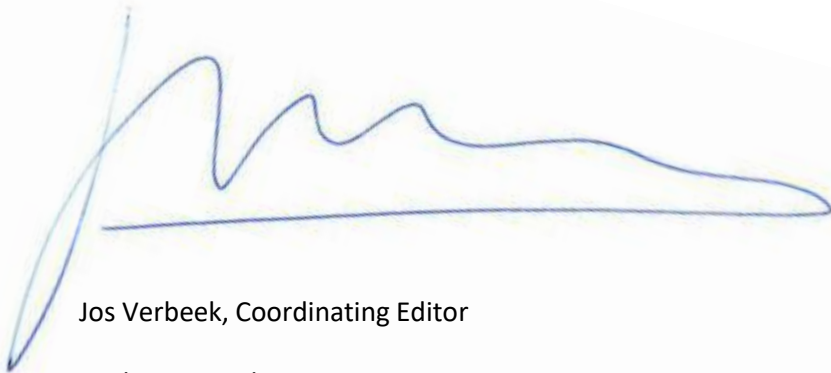
Journalist Robert Whitaker likens what happened to Peter Goetzsche with [the sad of story of Ignaz Semmelweis](#) who tried to get doctors to wash their hands before operating. Here is Robert's version of events titled: [The Cochrane Collaboration Has Failed Us All](#).

Another worried observer of the situation, David Hammerstein, one of the nominated members of the Governing Board (so, a complete outsider) who also resigned in protest of Peter's expulsion has commented that the Governing Board was highly ineffective and obsessed with protecting the Cochrane 'brand'. [Read his take on the need to regenerate Cochrane](#).

The result of the process is that we are further away than ever from a climate in Cochrane where we can have constructive discussions on what we want Cochrane to be and where we want to go. The 'zero tolerance for bad behaviour' and the continuation of business as usual by the current remaining Governing Board has further increased the unsafe climate that characterizes Cochrane. You better not speak out because it might have consequences for your position in Cochrane.

The current crisis has also made clear that the members of Cochrane are not involved in what is happening. Currently 11080 people are registered members. They were all entitled to vote at the AGM but only 250 voted. This is not surprising given that all communication in Cochrane is top-down and there is no forum for discussion between members.

It is a sad and disappointing story that is unfolding. I joined Cochrane because it was an organisation with people that were highly motivated to show that evidence-based medicine could improve health care. It is difficult to see this now. The only hope is that members get organised and vote for change in Cochrane.



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