Christine Neville applauds the work of the Cochrane Collaboration, which has been keeping nurses clinically informed for 20 years

IT IS exciting to see regular reference to Cochrane systematic reviews in articles published in Nursing Older People. This demonstrates the journal’s commitment to strengthen the evidence base for nurses caring for this patient group.

A nurse’s practice is developed from a variety of sources. Over a period of time, educational, personal and work experiences influence how one chooses to nurse. However, some of these sources may not have a strong evidence base. Historically, care of older people is one area of nursing that is rife with attitudes such as ‘this is how it has always been done’, rather than based on the best possible evidence. This is why the work of the Cochrane Collaboration, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, is invaluable.

This international network representing more than 120 countries publishes systematic reviews online as part of the Cochrane Library. A systematic review is considered to be the highest level of evidence because it synthesises all available high quality research for a particular clinical question. The systematic review is an essential component for the provision of evidence-based care.

In addition to the Cochrane Nursing Care Field established in 2009, the importance of care of older people to the work of the Cochrane Collaboration is reflected in the Health Care of Older People Field. The purpose of this field is to support the conduct, dissemination and use of systematic reviews relevant to the care of older people.

Latest reviews
This field provides easy access to the latest Cochrane reviews in relation to common clinical problems such as cognitive impairment, falls and pressure ulcers through to service provision issues for the acute, long-term care and rehabilitation sectors. For example, falls cause high rates of morbidity and mortality in older people and gerontological nurses often have to make recommendations for or implement effective falls prevention programmes so that these undesirable outcomes do not occur.

Two recent Cochrane reviews have examined the falls prevention evidence for older people in long-term care, hospitals and community settings (Cameron et al 2012, Gillespie et al 2012). Among other findings, the reviews concluded that vitamin D supplementation may reduce falls where people have lower levels of the vitamin in their blood.

At times a Cochrane review will report that an intervention is not supported by any evidence, which means that the intervention needs to be questioned more thoroughly before being implemented. The use of Cochrane reviews enables nurses caring for older people to make well-informed clinical decisions.

Nursing Older People is to be commended for making access to the valuable work of the Cochrane Collaboration easier through reference to relevant reviews. This will no doubt increase use of the latest and most robust research to support clinical practice and further the aim of the journal to inform, support and educate nurses in the pursuit of excellence in care of older patients.

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References

Find out more
Visit the Cochrane Nursing Care Field website at http://cncf.cochrane.org and Health Care of Older People Field at www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/effectiveolderpeoplecare.aspx