

# **The decline and fall of the Cochrane empire**

Peter C. Gøtzsche  
Institute for Scientific Freedom

Peter C Gøtzsche

# **The decline and fall of the Cochrane empire**

Institute for Scientific Freedom

**The decline and fall of the Cochrane empire**

© Peter C. Gøtzsche 2022

Cover: the author

ISBN: 978-87-972291-6-3

1. Edition, 1. Print

Printed in Denmark 2022

All rights reserved. The copyright belongs to the author.

This book is provided for free.

It shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,  
be lent, sold, re-sold, hired out or  
otherwise circulated without the author's prior consent.

Institute for Scientific Freedom  
Copenhagen  
[www.scientificfreedom.dk](http://www.scientificfreedom.dk)

## Contents

1 Introduction .....	3
Cochrane expels one of its best known persons.....	4
2 Cochrane’s moral decline started in 2011 .....	5
3 Cochrane’s new CEO Mark Wilson was hostile and destructive from day 1 .....	8
4 Wilson’s systematic destruction of the Cochrane centres .....	10
2013: Wilson killed Alan Cassels 20 <sup>th</sup> Cochrane anniversary book, too much Gøtzsche.....	14
2014: Wilson deliberately ruined my reputation .....	14
2015: My article in the Daily Mail about psychiatric drugs.....	17
2016: Proper use of the Spokesperson Policy while Wilson was on holidays .....	20
2017: Irish TV about the HPV vaccines.....	22
2018: The letterhead was more important to Wilson than why young people died .....	23
2018: My expert testimony in a Dutch double homicide trial .....	27
5 My election to the Governing Board in January 2017 and Wilson’s silly micromanagement.....	29
Serious tampering with meeting minutes in Genève in 2017.....	33
6 Cochrane on industry payroll .....	37
7 The emperor embarrasses himself in front of his entourage .....	40
8 Wilson escalates the conflict to the extreme .....	42
9 Preparations for the show trial .....	51
10 My reply to criticism in my 66-page report to Counsel .....	52
2003: Letter from Steering Group co-chair Jim Neilson .....	53
2017: When the emperor embarrassed himself in front of his entourage .....	56
Burton lied blatantly in his report to Counsel about decisions in Genève in 2017 .....	56
11 Wilson’s reply to Counsel.....	58
12 The show trial.....	59
The Spokesperson Policy: Wilson’s helping hand to the drug industry .....	71
Counsel’s praise of those who paid him .....	75
My criticism of psychiatric drugs was the main reason for my expulsion .....	77
2015: The Maudsley debate .....	78
Our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review contributed to my expulsion .....	78

Burton likely orchestrated letters of complaint about the HPV vaccine affair.....	86
Burton’s pathetic amateur theatre .....	95
Allegations of sexual harassment, Me Too .....	98
How can we kick him out and what are the consequences? .....	99
The finale .....	118
13 My expulsion and the reactions in the media .....	119
Burton’s instructions to Counsel were fraudulent.....	124
Wilson’s gobbledegook at my last centre directors’ meeting.....	127
Burton’s hate speech at the Annual General Meeting .....	132
14 The following months .....	138
Untrue board statements and calls for an independent investigation.....	139
Cochrane webinars lied about the reasons for my expulsion.....	142
Hammerstein’s brilliant analysis of the show trial and Cochrane .....	145
Jos Verbeek, editor of the Cochrane Work group, establishes a counter movement.....	149
15 Cochrane’s CEO Mark Wilson got me fired from my job in Denmark .....	155
Letters and articles of support to prevent my dismissal.....	160
The masterplan went beyond Cochrane .....	163
16 Who was Mark Wilson and was he planted with the aim of destroying Cochrane?.....	166
17 Who was the person Cochrane expelled? .....	174
Life after Cochrane .....	178
Videos of lectures and interviews .....	180

## 1 Introduction

The Cochrane Collaboration was founded by Sir Iain Chalmers in Oxford, United Kingdom. It was named after Archie Cochrane who asked: “How can we have a rational health service if we don’t know which of the things being done in it are useful and which are useless or possibly even harmful?”<sup>1</sup> Cochrane also noted that it was a great criticism of the medical profession that doctors had not organised a critical summary, by specialty or subspecialty, adapted periodically, of all relevant randomised trials.”<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1970s, Chalmers and his colleagues were searching for randomised trials in obstetrics, which led to the publication of a massive two-volume book, *Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth*, in 1989, which was a landmark in evidence-based healthcare. A year before his death in 1988, Cochrane [praised this achievement](#) and said it would be nice to see this kind of rigour applied to all of medicine.

Chalmers took up this challenge, too. He invited me to join a small group of people who started the Cochrane Collaboration with him in 1993. It was an idealistic grassroots movement, based on a common frustration that we cannot trust the medical research literature. We agreed to copy the methods Chalmers and colleagues had used for obstetrics and to publish the reviews electronically so that they could be updated when new trials emerged.<sup>3</sup>

The Cochrane Collaboration quickly proved to be the most important organisation in the world that aimed to help people make informed decisions about healthcare interventions. It was therefore not surprising that only 18 months after it was founded, a *Lancet* editorial said it “[rivals the Human Genome Project](#) in its potential implications for modern medicine.”

A good decision may mean the difference between life and death. It is therefore of utmost importance that evaluations of diagnostic methods and treatments are as impartial as possible, both when the original research is made and when it is summarised in systematic reviews like Cochrane reviews.

We must never forget that the way we use drugs is heavily influenced by commercial interests and that drug regulation has failed us. If it hadn’t, our prescription drugs would not be the third leading cause of death,<sup>4 5</sup> after heart disease and cancer. Most of those who die didn’t even need the drugs that killed them.

The Cochrane Collaboration prospered; attracted some of the brightest and most generous people in healthcare; and received support from governments all over the world. It was a remarkable success story of what can be obtained by voluntary, unpaid work and collaboration.

This should have continued. But in 2012, the Cochrane leaders committed a fatal mistake by employing the wrong man as Cochrane’s new CEO, the British journalist Mark Wilson.

The following account describes how Wilson destroyed what was likely the most important institution ever in healthcare, which 30,000 people had patiently built up before he took office. He suddenly left his job in the middle of a month, in April 2021, without leaving a farewell message,

---

<sup>1</sup> Cassels A. [The Cochrane Collaboration celebrates 20 years](#). CMAJ 2013;185:1162-3.

<sup>2</sup> Cochrane AL. 1931-1971: a critical review, with particular reference to the medical profession. In: *Medicine for the year 2000*. London: Office of Health Economics;1979:1-11.

<sup>3</sup> Cassels A. [The Cochrane Collaboration: medicine’s best-kept secret](#). Gabriola: Agio Publishing House; 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly medicines and organised crime: How big pharma has corrupted health care](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mental health survival kit and withdrawal from psychiatric drugs](#). Ann Arbor: L H Press; 2022.

seven days before a webinar where the UK funder announced that a major budget cut was likely in 2022.

This is a story about institutional corruption, an insatiable thirst for power, and the rapid transformation of a prosperous democracy into a brutal tyranny.

Much of what follows is taken from the book I published on 30 January 2019, [Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#).<sup>6</sup> A book review noted that, "This book carefully recounts this dark period in medical science where a once trusted institution carried out one of the worst show trials ever conducted in academia. The CEO and his collaborators went about their task in a manner that mirrors how the drug industry operates."<sup>7</sup>

Wilson expelled one of the best known persons in Cochrane. That person was me. I threatened his grip on power and was a vociferous critic of the organised crime in the drug industry, but Wilson disliked [my book](#) about this. Moreover, many of the things Wilson did were highly bizarre and difficult to understand. Journalists have therefore raised some interesting questions, which are still unanswered. Did Wilson have powerful friends in the drug industry? Was he planted to destroy Cochrane?

The current book is a lot more than the first one. I have added important events that took place after 2018; rearranged the text substantially; and added and deleted a lot of information.

Above all, now that time has passed, I have been able to understand more clearly what happened, the dire motives behind it, and the huge consequences of Cochrane's downfall. Many people lost their trust in Cochrane when Wilson expelled me in 2018 and if they go to the Internet instead of going to the *Cochrane Library*, it might endanger their health, as there is so much flawed and dangerously misleading information out there.<sup>8</sup>

### **Cochrane expels one of its best known persons**

It was 13 September 2018. I was waiting in a hotel room in Edinburgh with one of my researchers, Maryanne Demasi from Sydney, when my good friend David Hammerstein, a member of the Cochrane Collaboration Governing Board, called me at 4.20 p.m.: "The board has just expelled you, not only from the board but also as a member of Cochrane."



Maryanne Demasi



David Hammerstein

---

<sup>6</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Timimi S. "[Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#)". *Psychosis* 2019; Oct 30.

<sup>8</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Survival in an overmedicated world: look up the evidence yourself](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2019.

Hammerstein had just left the meeting of trustees. From the outset, the two co-chairs of the board had already made up their minds. They wanted me out, to please their master, Cochrane's CEO Mark Wilson. The only problem was convincing the rest of the board.

An investigation had been conducted in a haste by a law firm hired and paid for by Cochrane. It was sparked by a series of petty complaints levelled against me by Wilson. It escalated into a full scale assault on me and my role as Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre in Copenhagen, and it ended in a malicious attempt at character assassination in a secret show trial, which was full of lies, against which I was prohibited from defending myself.

Although I was fully exonerated by the legal investigation, the co-chairs were unscrupulous, and conjured up a spurious excuse to expel me. As in Kafka's novel, *The trial*, they accused me of "bad behaviour," which they never defined. Without justification, I was booted out of Cochrane. A further 4 of the 13 board members resigned in protest. These were the best ones. What Cochrane was left with was a board that was weaker than ever, and Wilson steered Cochrane like *Titanic* towards an iceberg, they refused to see coming.

Cochrane remained afloat for another three years but started sinking when it was announced [in August 2021](#) that from March 2023, the 21 of the world's 52 review groups based in the UK would be stripped of all its funding.

After Cochrane had sacrificed me, the whistleblower, in 2018, it went into damage control. It spent the next few weeks justifying its actions, issuing mendacious and defamatory statements against me during carefully staged public events. It set off a chain reaction of protests by scientists and members of the public, many demanding that the decision be overturned.

How did Cochrane react? The way any business with a dishonest leadership would react. It hid behind confidentiality clauses and continued to defame me, misleading millions of people, including its own members, about what really happened that day in Edinburgh.

## **2 Cochrane's moral decline started in 2011**

Cochrane's moral decline started in the summer of 2011 with the employment of a new director for the UK Cochrane Centre, Martin Burton, an Ear, Nose and Throat consultant. He was the only Cochrane director that I – and most of the other centre directors - did not like, and our dislike for him was pronounced.

In contrast to us, he was pompous and often interjected in the discussions despite not knowing much about the issues. As a sign of his pomposity and grandiose sense of self-worth, he created the email address *director@cochrane.ac.uk*. All other Cochrane directors identified themselves by their names or initials.

Back then, the two co-chairs of the Cochrane Steering Group (now called Governing Board), Jeremy Grimshaw and Jonathan Craig, worked on a plan to change the structure and reporting channels in Cochrane substantially. Cochrane had grown too wildly in different directions and some harmonisation of methods, approaches and quality of our reviews was surely needed.

But the directors of the Cochrane centres, apart from Burton, became very nervous about what was going on. We felt we were not being sufficiently informed and that the proposed changes could fundamentally alter how we operated.

The Steering Group proposed that the centres, which were highly independent, should be managed by Cochrane's CEO, and the rationale for this was that the centres had more business

functions than scientific functions. We spoke out vociferously against this. Several centre directors were highly respected for their science and their skills were essential for their centre's survival. Few centres had core funding, and the only means of survival was to obtain funding for scientific projects that had nothing to do with Cochrane activities.

The autumn of 2011 was full of disappointments and angry email exchanges between centre directors from mainland Europe and USA. Kay Dickersin, US Cochrane Director, wrote: "If we took this route, it results in a very different Cochrane, and we may lose the volunteers as we become a full-fledged business."

When Burton sent an outline of his plans for the UK Cochrane Centre, our anxiety turned into shock. He would wind down the centre's programme of methodological research and replace it with a programme of research in "Learning and Development and Engagement." The German Cochrane Director Gerd Antes downplayed his irritation when he asked Burton to be more explicit about what a new "programme of engagement" was. My thought was: How on earth can "Learning and Development and Engagement" be "a programme of research"? Did the man know what he was talking about? Did he know what research was? To me, this was nonsense.

We felt that Burton, the two Steering Group co-chairs, and from 2012 also the new CEO, Mark Wilson, had conspired on a plan they were not willing to be transparent about. Cochrane has always been highly Anglocentric, and these people all lived in countries ruled by Queen Elisabeth: the UK, Canada and Australia. The rest of the world constantly struggled to exert any influence on Cochrane politics. When Iain Chalmers invited us to start the Cochrane Collaboration in 1993, he wrote in his invitational letter:

"The purpose of the first Cochrane Colloquium will be to launch the Cochrane Collaboration formally as a truly international collaboration (committed to opposing any tendency for it to become dominated by any nation, institution or individual)." Unfortunately, Cochrane became totally dominated by one person, Wilson.

Burton didn't try to find out what we expected of him, what our common culture was, or what his current staff was doing, before he rushed into a "restructuring process" that would leave a lot of people unhappy. Some of his staff told us that they would all be fired just before Christmas.

Burton employed a so-called human resource manager whose job it was to fire his staff. He had the indecency to bring her along to the next centre directors' meeting without having asked for permission to do this, to the great dismay of all of us who highly valued the people he had just fired.

Burton displayed brutal behaviour on other occasions. Jos Verbeek, editor of the Cochrane Work group, told me that, whenever Cochrane was criticized at the editors' Executive Board, Burton always argued the loudest that strong action should be taken. In 2015, when the editor of the Cochrane Injuries group, Ian Roberts, was first author on a criticism of Cochrane reviews in the *BMJ*,<sup>9</sup> Burton shouted that he should be expelled. Verbeek suggested that it might be worthwhile to resolve the conflict in a constructive dialogue, but Burton didn't accept his proposal. He was not even willing to engage in a public debate with Roberts at the upcoming Cochrane Colloquium. After Verbeek had mediated, which resulted in a very soft landing, Burton called Verbeek a softie who didn't know how to lead an organisation.

Robert's arguments were very good, and Cochrane should have listened to him. He asked: "How can Cochrane claim to provide trusted evidence when all evidence is taken on trust?" In his

---

<sup>9</sup> Roberts I, Ker K, Edwards P, et al. [The knowledge system underpinning healthcare is not fit for purpose and must change](#). *BMJ* 2015;350:h2463.

specialty, anaesthesia, particularly many trials had been shown to be fraudulent. Roberts described that he began to have doubts about the honest reporting of trials after a colleague asked if he knew that his systematic review showing that mannitol halved deaths from head injury was based on trials that had never happened.<sup>10</sup> He didn't, but he investigated the issue. All the trials had a lead author who purported to come from an institution that didn't exist and who killed himself a few years later. The trials were all published in prestigious neurosurgery journals and had multiple co-authors. None of the co-authors had contributed patients to the trials, and some didn't know that they were authors until after the trials were published. When Roberts contacted one of the journals, the editor responded that, "I wouldn't trust the data." Why, Roberts wondered, did he then publish the trial? None of the trials have been retracted.

Roberts suggested in his *BMJ* paper that authors of doubtful trials should be asked to provide the original data for checking, and if they declined, the trial should be removed from the analysis and the reasons stated in the review.

The preparations for a business-like Cochrane paved the way for Cochrane's strongman, CEO Mark Wilson, who was employed in the autumn of 2012. Several centre directors quickly noticed his great thirst for power and admiration. Some gave examples of where Wilson took credit for what they had achieved through arduous work and that he often failed to respect other people in leadership positions. Burton didn't respect other people either, so it is no surprise that they became very close and dominant in Cochrane.

Wilson and Burton are the two big scoundrels in this story. Both men displayed tyrannical behaviour and [psychopathic traits](#):

"Psychopathy is characterized by diagnostic features such as superficial charm, high intelligence, poor judgment and failure to learn from experience, pathological egocentricity and incapacity for love, lack of remorse or shame, impulsivity, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathological lying, manipulative behavior, poor self-control ... the image of the psychopath is that of a cold, heartless, inhuman being." Other texts describe a psychopath as someone who is callous, unemotional, and morally depraved, with impaired empathy. Psychopaths also lie easily and bluntly and violate the rules other people abide to.

I was very unlucky that I came up against such personalities as Wilson and Burton who spared no means. It is a battle that cannot be won, which I did not realise in time. I played by the rules; they violated them totally and shamelessly and lied about the facts.



Mark Wilson



Martin Burton

---

<sup>10</sup> Smith R. [Time to assume that health research is fraudulent until proven otherwise?](#) *BMJ* 2021 July 5.

Wilson introduced many indigestible policies and a huge bureaucracy, which resulted in long documents that were impossible to remember, or even just to know how the text should be interpreted. This is counter-productive but typical for the kind of managers that cause upheaval and leave everyone confused when they move on to “new challenges,” before people realise, they have been fooled.

During the secret show trial against me, board member Nancy Santesso said: “Mark shows up with his 50,000 papers and when someone says ... ‘but that’s doesn’t make sense’... nothing actually gets changed. It is Mark and his staff pushing the agenda here. Can we not admit to ourselves that what we’re putting in front of us is just non-stop papers just so that they can do what they want to do?”

Santesso alluded to the fact that the CEO controlled the board and paralysed them with all his papers and bullet points, and she also pointed out that many people were unhappy with the direction of travel in Cochrane, which I tried to change while I was on the board.

### **3 Cochrane’s new CEO Mark Wilson was hostile and destructive from day 1**

On 6 September 2012, all members of Cochrane received a message from the Steering Group that Mark Wilson had been employed as the new Chief Executive Officer of The Cochrane Collaboration: “Mark is a highly skilled and experienced manager of complex organisations and international operations involving multi-cultural teams, strategic thinking and policy-making, organisational planning and implementation. As his background indicates, he shares the ethos and values of the Collaboration, and we look forward to his leadership of our organisation.”

It would soon become clear that it was immensely misleading to say that Wilson “shares the ethos and values of the Collaboration.” He was in total opposition to the values we stood for.

I had arranged a two-day strategic planning meeting for continental European centre directors in Copenhagen in January 2013 because we were very worried about the announced fundamental changes for Cochrane, which we perceived as management by stealth. We hoped we could influence Wilson and get on good terms with him and therefore invited him for the second day of the meeting. He wanted to participate both days, but we explained that we needed a full day to sort things out for ourselves before we met with him.

Wilson was manipulative right from the start. He replied that he thought the meeting was “our joint initiative hatched in Auckland,” where we had met with him three months earlier, “so I’m not sure what you have in mind.”

It was not a joint initiative. Antes wrote to Wilson explaining that we needed a frank discussion among ourselves because we had enormous differences in funding and strategies for surviving. Several centres were in crisis because their funding was entirely project based.

Wilson didn’t care but embarked on his path to obtaining supreme power and control over everything in Cochrane, even over people who struggled to survive and gave Cochrane a lot for free. It was typical of Wilson that he had a different perception than others about what was agreed earlier; a difference that always worked in his favour.

During our meeting, Wilson declared that he would take over my Cochrane IT team of eight people and employ them under himself, in London, while they would continue being stationed at my centre. I still contributed a substantial amount of money to the team and tried several times to talk him out of it saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” but to no avail. He was unable to explain his

rationale and said something diffusely about “accountability,” to which I responded that the team was accountable to me, which they, and the rest of Cochrane, had always appreciated.

Two months later, at the centre directors’ meeting in Oxford, Wilson justified his hostile takeover by claiming that my IT team was in crisis. I said it wasn’t true, and Wilson didn’t clarify what he meant. Cochrane contributors had always highly valued the work of my team. Some top executives are very good at playing the game: Pretend there is a problem, solve the non-existing problem, and get credit for your excellent leadership skills.

It took more than a year and involved lawyers on both sides to accomplish Wilson’s hostile takeover, for which my hospital had absolutely no sympathy. My hospital encouraged me to seek economic compensation, but none was granted. Wilson took what I had built up over 19 years without thanking me for my colossal contribution to Cochrane, neither personally, nor officially, e.g. on the Cochrane website. The takeover harmed the charity, and it increased the costs. I no longer contributed financially, and Cochrane now had to pay rent to the hospital.

The takeover made many staff members unhappy. A couple of days after it had been accomplished, the IT team leader, Jessica Thomas, was callously fired during a Cochrane meeting in Athens. If she had been fired while working for me, the hospital would have been obliged to try and find another job for her. Wilson did not even consider whether she could be useful somewhere else in Cochrane even though the review group in the UK she worked for before she came to me had valued her highly. I began to understand why his CV described other ruthless acts of firing people.

Two very good IT specialists were presented with such poor offers and treated so badly by Wilson’s staff that they left for much better paid jobs (salary increases of more than DKK10,000 per month). One of them was highly dissatisfied that his previous job experience did not count for Wilson, only the time he had been employed at Cochrane. This was not the case when two other IT staff were employed under Wilson’s leadership. This is one of many examples that, under Wilson’s rule, some are more equal than others, as in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. The two IT people who left described Cochrane’s Human Resources Department as a disaster. There were no negotiations about salaries; it was “take it or leave it.”

Several of the currently employed IT staff told me they were unhappy with Wilson’s leadership, and that much of what he said did not make sense to them. Furthermore, new people only got short-term contracts of 12 months, which is not how we treat staff in Denmark.

When Wilson had been in office for a year, an article in a major medical journal noted that, “Eyebrows may rise when the realization kicks in that someone with no health care experience is now leading one of the foremost organizations dedicated to ensuring good clinical decisions.”<sup>11</sup> Imagine a top tier law firm hiring a CEO with no knowledge of the law, or a national bank being led by someone with no experience in financial markets?

In September 2013, I published my book, [\*Deadly medicines and organised crime: How big pharma has corrupted healthcare\*](#). It got enormous publicity. It came out in 16 languages; I was interviewed all over the world, in TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. It was also mentioned in a [TED talk](#): “The pharmaceutical industry doesn’t sell drugs; it sells lies about drugs ... Pharmaceuticals are the third leading cause of death, after heart disease and cancer.” I was the first person ever who dared call the business methods of big pharma organised crime.

Two weeks later, I attended the Cochrane Colloquium in Quebec. My publisher sent a load of books to my hotel that I could sell it at the meeting by asking people to sign a form with their credit card number and signature.

---

<sup>11</sup> Chanchlani N. New CEO transforming the Cochrane Collaboration. CMAJ 2013;185:1123.

My Cochrane colleagues found my book fascinating. Drummond Rennie, previous editor at *JAMA*, wrote in his foreword that what made my book new and interesting was:

“The unique scientific abilities, research, integrity, truthfulness, and courage of the author. Gøtzsche’s experience is unequaled ... Gøtzsche has proposals and calls for revolution. To me nothing will help unless we disconnect completely the performance and assessment of trials from the funding of trials. We base our treatments on the results of clinical trials, so the results are a matter of life and death. Patients who allow themselves to be entered into trials expect their sacrifice to benefit humanity. What they do not expect is that their results will be held, and manipulated, as trade secrets ... Revolution? Gøtzsche is right ... Gøtzsche is angry at the behavior of academia and industry, he has a right to be. What’s needed is more of Gøtzsche’s evidence-based outrage.”

That was certainly not Wilson’s view of the world. To my huge surprise, he disliked my book. He is not a good actor, and when we met at the colloquium, he was openly unfriendly with me. It was obvious that Wilson as CEO meant trouble for me.

#### **4 Wilson’s systematic destruction of the Cochrane centres**

Wilson’s interactions with the Cochrane centres were devastating. Directors or other key people in 9 of the 12 oldest Cochrane centres conveyed to me that they were unhappy with the way Cochrane headquarters dealt with them. Several centre directors felt threatened and were considering leaving Cochrane to become centres for evidence-based medicine, because Wilson’s policies stifled academic freedom and put burdens on them that were not productive.

I had observed on several occasions that when Wilson didn’t get what he wanted when he negotiated with people, he returned one to two months later and postulated the exact opposite of what was said and agreed upon. Sometimes he tried to make people doubt their own memories of the events by being aggressive and manipulative, or by [tampering with meeting minutes](#).

A typical [example](#) of this happened in 2016 in relation to a working group of centre directors I participated in. Wilson claimed he was a member of our group, which he was not; he was convinced that we had agreed on something radically different to what we had agreed on; his attitude towards other centre directors was disrespectful; and he felt he was in a position to sign off something on our behalf, which he wasn’t.

When I pointed some of this out to Wilson, he became very angry with me although I was only the messenger for our group, and although we were the ones who should be upset, not him.

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 survived by obtaining funding for non-Cochrane activities.

Quite often, important documents about controversial issues where, for example, centre directors were strongly opposed to Wilson’s ideas, were sent out one to two days before meetings and we were then asked to make a decision, without having had time to check the information. For example, the Memorandum of Understanding, a very important contract between centres and Wilson, was sent two days before the meeting, and another crucial document was sent for approval in mid-July when most of the centre directors that had been involved in the work were on holiday. The rest hardly knew anything about what we and Wilson disagreed about.

Wilson’s leadership style involved stepping into centre directors’ territories without their permission; without informing them; without responding to them when they brought it up; and continuing not to copy them on essential emails even after they had complained about this

transgression of Cochrane rules. This was very harmful of course, particularly since Wilson lacked the knowledge about local circumstances, which was so essential for a good outcome. Several centre directors were top researchers and were therefore influential in their countries. Wilson did not or would not understand that it is far better to trust the directors and let them do the work than to distrust them and step on their toes.

Wilson contacted US-based funders without informing the centre and without their permission. He did this in at least three other cases, involving three other Cochrane centres, which demonstrated his total lack of respect for other people. Two years before they closed the US Cochrane Center on 9 February 2018, out of desperation over Wilson's "leadership," one of the directors wrote to me:

"We are extremely upset about what Mark is doing with US-based funders. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between his office and us, but they do not adhere to it at all. As you said, he just does what he wants to do. There is no oversight from anyone. The Steering Group is too weak. I don't understand at all what he is after. He is not interested in science nor the true value of Cochrane. It's not a happy job either as many of us go against him. So, what is he after?"

French Cochrane Director, Philippe Ravaud, sent a [damning complaint](#) to the Steering Group in December 2015. He stated unreservedly what most of us thought, and the reason he dared speak out loud was that he announced his immediate resignation at the same time.

Ravaud profoundly disagreed with the changes in Cochrane and with the methods used by the Cochrane Central Executive Team (CET). He called them "power-hungry technocrats"<sup>12</sup> who saw Cochrane centres as their pawns or low-skilled employees. Ravaud also noted that many centre directors and other leaders were scared of this development, which was centred around Wilson.

Cochrane headquarters had set up European projects for translation of Cochrane reviews with Ravaud's French partners whom they only knew about thanks to Ravaud. They used his ideas, did not inform him in advance, considered themselves competent for all decisions, allocated human and financial resources to themselves and to those who helped them strengthen their power.

Ravaud noted that his team had developed automatic translation software specific to Cochrane materials and had translated over 10,000 abstracts and Plain Language Summaries without any help from Cochrane. He was now asked to participate in a subcontract as a service provider.

Headquarters had asked him to use a costly and inefficient software, which meant that his volunteers decreased from 20 to one in less than 6 months. The feedback to the Steering Group was that, overall, the translation project progressed very well. It was not the tool that was inefficient, it was the way Ravaud managed volunteers. Even when the CET fail in their missions, there is little chance of implementing any change, as they assess themselves. They are always happy with what they have done and if it does not work it is because others are not sufficiently productive or supportive.

The increase of the size of the CET over the last three years was impressive and contrasted with the stagnation of available means for review groups and centres, although the money resulted from the collective efforts of these groups through royalties.

Ravaud criticised the fact that the CEO and his team were chairs or co-chairs of every working group in Cochrane and considered this pyramidal structure irrelevant and dangerous. They did not consider that their role was to support groups and centres. They thought that the groups and centres were there to support their work, as their service providers. They were leading Cochrane in a way that was contrary to the first principle (collaboration) and dangerous for the second (building on the enthusiasm of individuals). Their view was that they would always have volunteers. Ravaud's view was that they

---

<sup>12</sup> Newman M. Has Cochrane lost its way? BMJ 2019;364:k5302.

could discourage very quickly all these volunteers (including himself). He was afraid that more and more Cochrane people would do their innovative work and publish their reviews outside of Cochrane.

Wilson's claim that they would always have volunteers is like claiming it doesn't matter if slaves are worked to their deaths, as there will always be more slaves.

In 2014, Brazilian Cochrane Director Alvaro Atallah invited Wilson to Brazil to present what he had achieved. Wilson was very impressed and promised to send a report back that Atallah could use for political purposes, which he never did. Wilson wanted to involve some people who had committed misconduct even though Atallah had told them that they were not welcome. He also wanted to "do business" with the President of the Brazilian Medical Association, Florentino Cardoso Filho, who had no scientific credentials and to have him replace Atallah, a well-known scientist who had been on Brazilian TV over 500 times talking about evidence-based healthcare. Some years later, it was discovered that the President had participated in defrauding the association for about \$9 million via a ghost account.<sup>13</sup>



Philippe Ravaud



Alvaro Atallah

Another person went to work for a drug company and understood that he could no longer be involved with the Brazilian centre, but Wilson said that there were no rules that forbade this.

It was agreed 8 years earlier that a centre in Portugal would become a Brazilian Cochrane branch. However, Wilson said this agreement was invalid because there was nothing in writing about it, and he denounced Atallah in the presence of the Iberoamerican Cochrane Director Xavier Bonfill and a high-ranked Brazilian. It was Atallah's clear perception that Wilson wanted to get rid of the Cochrane pioneers so that he could manage the young people as he pleased.

A co-chair of the Steering Group and a Cochrane director in a Middle East country had agreed that a Cochrane author in another Middle East country with a highly sensitive political and social situation should lead the establishment of a Cochrane centre in that country. However, Wilson took over the leadership role in an inappropriate manner without respecting that the Cochrane author knew far more about the culture and local circumstances. This deteriorated into a situation that was outright dangerous for some of the people involved, but Wilson didn't listen.

A local troublemaker in that country tried to abuse Cochrane for her own purposes and generated a good deal of noise, but Wilson overruled the Cochrane author's great concerns and wanted to work not only with the troublemaker because of her "business like" approach but also with her friends, some of whom had a questionable academic background.

---

<sup>13</sup> [O escândalo que sacode a medicina brasileira](#). Diario do Centro do Mundo 2020 Oct 22.

The Cochrane author had a good relationship with the Minister, but Wilson emailed the Minister in an inappropriate way that became an issue of national pride. It was difficult for the Cochrane author to sort out all the mess Wilson had caused.

When Wilson visited the country, he said in his speech that an Asian Cochrane director was not delivering what was expected of him, which was also highly embarrassing. Wilson did not take into account that the conditions were difficult in that country.

The Cochrane author told me that Cochrane had developed into a self-congratulatory organisation; that self-criticism was no longer welcome; and that many people had pointed out that Wilson was the one who evaluated how good he had been as a leader and always said that everything went very well.

[My own examples](#) include that Wilson and his staff interfered inappropriately and without being asked when I established the two newest of my associated centres, in Russia and Sweden, in 2017. This caused great problems for us, as my careful preparations in both countries were jeopardised.

In 2014, I worked on establishing a Russian centre in Kazan, Tatarstan, with Lilia Ziganshina as Director, which was not easy in a male and Moscow dominated Russia. Suddenly, one of Wilson's staff suggested to a person that he should help set up and coordinate a "Russian project." However, this person was once Director for a Russian branch in Moscow of my centre that I needed to close due to serious irregularities, which involved selling bits of Cochrane reviews illegally to a publisher.

Wilson didn't care that he repeatedly violated the written agreements he had made with centre directors. When I pointed out that he had stepped into my territory without my permission and knowledge, he didn't reply. The co-chairs of the board didn't reply either, although Wilson continued to correspond directly with Ziganshina without copying me. They always pleased their master. When Wilson kicked me out of Cochrane, Ziganshina reproached me that I protested against this injustice. In Russia, people know it is better to support the tyrants than their victims.

In Sweden, the intrusions of Wilson and his staff led to chaos, which it took us some time to disentangle. They wrongly assumed that a trouble-maker who had contacted them was the key person in the country and they didn't even have the courtesy to ask me if this was correct before they went into action and messed up everything.

When the Swedish centre had been registered, Wilson, who had had nothing to do with it apart from his screw ups, presented a [video of himself](#) on the Cochrane webpage where he said how pleased he was that there was now a Cochrane centre in Sweden. Wilson was in focus all the time; there was no other footage. He congratulated the new Swedish Cochrane Director several times but said nothing about my pivotal role in establishing the centre, which was difficult because there were two strong candidates and political rivalry. Wilson always avoided giving credit to people he didn't like, no matter how great their achievements. He ignored them, or punished them, which is not what motivates people. By the end of his self-promoting talk, he regretted he could not come to the opening of the centre. In truth, he was not invited.

The harmful actions by Wilson and his staff were felt by most centres whose directors continued to report that Wilson didn't listen and overruled people who were more knowledgeable than himself.

To the chagrin of many senior Cochrane leaders, Wilson threw out "Collaboration" from our registered charity name, although collaboration was what distinguished us from a business and from other scientific organisations where competition was at the forefront. We were told, in a 93 page edict called "Brand guidelines," that "you can talk about us as a collaboration, using a small 'c'". This fitted well with the fact that it was not possible to cooperate with Wilson. You could only obey orders.

Wilson also changed our logo and required that we no longer used our existing names by dropping the word “Centre.” Thus, the obligatory logo on my centre’s letterhead included “Cochrane Nordic,” which confused people, and I constantly needed to remind journalists that this wasn’t our name.

Only recently did I realise that this was an element in Wilson’s masterplan of obtaining absolute power over all matters in Cochrane, big and small. In December 2018, someone discovered that centres had ceased to exist. In the description of the various Cochrane groups on the website, this word has been deleted and centres were now called “[Geographic Groups](#).” Another example of management by stealth.

### **2013: Wilson killed Alan Cassels 20<sup>th</sup> Cochrane anniversary book, too much Gøtzsche**

In 2011, two years ahead of Cochrane’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Cochrane leadership asked science journalist Alan Cassels to write a book about Cochrane. He interviewed a lot of people during the colloquium in Madrid the same year.

However, in February 2013, Cassels wrote to Tom Jefferson and me that he considered us the most trusted people in Cochrane and that he wanted to share the bad news with us first. He had just got off the phone with Wilson who had just killed his book. Wilson had told him that he had needed to be much more critical of my work.

Alan wrote: “I feel like I’ve gotten knives sticking out of my back right now.” Sounds familiar. Wilson in action, killing something or someone, or both.

Seven months later, when we met in Dartmouth, New Hampshire, Cassels told me that one of the reasons why he had not been allowed to finish his book was that “there was too much Peter Gøtzsche in it.” Wilson, David Tovey, Editor-in-Chief and Deputy CEO, and the co-chairs of the Cochrane Steering Group, Jeremy Grimshaw and Jonathan Craig, didn’t like the book. I did a few searches in his draft and could understand why.

The founder of Cochrane, Iain Chalmers, was mentioned 160 times; I was mentioned 30 times; Lisa Bero (a future co-chair) 19 times; Jefferson 17 times; Neilson, a previous co-chair, 5 times; Tovey 5 times; and Grimshaw 3 times. Wilson and Craig were not mentioned at all.

The reason Jefferson and I figured so much in the book was that we had contributed a lot to Cochrane, in many different ways, and Cassels wanted to write a book about the most essential events in Cochrane’s history, not about those with most shoulder stripes.

I told Cassels that his work should not be discarded and offered him economic support, as there had never been a book about Cochrane. He found another publisher than Cochrane and the book appeared in 2015.<sup>14</sup>

### **2014: Wilson deliberately ruined my reputation**

Danish psychiatrist Søren Dalsgaard complained to Wilson on 20 January 2014 about an article I had published two weeks earlier in a Danish newspaper about ten myths in psychiatry that are harmful for the patients.<sup>15</sup> My article was [translated](#) into English, and it ended this way:

“Psychotropic drugs can be useful sometimes for some patients, particularly in short-term use, in the acute situations. But after my studies in this area, I have arrived at a very uncomfortable

---

<sup>14</sup> Cassels A. [The Cochrane Collaboration: medicine’s best-kept secret](#). Gabriola: Agio Publishing House; 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Gøtzsche PC. Psykiatri på afveje. Politikens kronik; 2014; 6. januar.

conclusion: Our citizens would be far better off if we removed all the psychotropic drugs from the market, as doctors are unable to handle them. It is inescapable that their availability causes more harm than good. The doctors cannot handle the paradox that drugs that can be useful in short-term treatment are very harmful when used for years and create those diseases they were meant to alleviate and even worse diseases. In the coming years, psychiatry should therefore do everything it can to treat as little as possible, in as short time as possible, or not at all, with psychotropic drugs.”

The evidence for my conclusions appeared a year later in my book, “[Deadly psychiatry and organised denial](#),” which was much appreciated by critical psychiatrists, other doctors and patients, and which was good PR for Cochrane (“Cochrane” appears 131 times in the book, and there are 35 references to Cochrane reviews).

Dalsgaard argued that I should have stated as a conflict of interest that I published a book in 2013 about [organised crime](#) in the drug industry because I had a personal financial gain from the sales. This is silly. Everyone knows that authors get royalties. This is not something you can conceal. Further, this book had nothing to do with my newspaper article.

The two co-chairs of the Steering Group were forthcoming. Jeremy Grimshaw coined the idea that a formal policy might be needed about when Cochrane leaders represent Cochrane (which is the background for the Spokesperson Policy): “I think we should probably let Peter know that you received this and potentially offer to have a chat if it would be helpful. Fun!” Lisa Bero agreed and noted that the letter said I had stated that I represented the Cochrane centre and not the Cochrane Collaboration, “it would be hard to say that he cannot represent the centre.”

Despite the co-chairs’ wishes about informing me, Wilson didn’t do this. I did not see Dalsgaard’s foolish letter before I saw it in the binder from Cochrane’s law firm, in August 2018.

I was not informed either about a letter from 5 March 2014 the Danish Psychiatric Association sent to the Cochrane Schizophrenia group and the Cochrane Depression group. The psychiatrists included a letter published by Peter Schwarz, Chairman of the Organisation of Danish Medical Societies, six months earlier in a Danish newspaper the day after my book about organised crime came out.

Schwarz’ letter was grossly inaccurate, which I explained in the same newspaper<sup>16</sup> and could have told Wilson about if he had involved me in the process. But he already had me as his primary target.

On 20 March 2014, Wilson sent a letter to the Danish Psychiatric Association without consulting me beforehand, which proved to be a threat to my centre’s very existence. It was co-signed by Tovey and the two co-chairs, Grimshaw and Bero. In it, Wilson stated:

“Cochrane is treating very seriously the points you raise concerning comments made by Professor Gøtzsche on the use of psychotropic medication. I want to state explicitly that these are not the views of the Cochrane Collaboration on this issue, and we do not endorse them. Professor Gøtzsche was therefore speaking only for himself in the articles and video featured on the websites you highlighted - part of the promotional work he conducted surrounding publication of his book, 'Deadly Medicines and Organised Crime: How big pharma has corrupted healthcare'. The views contained in this book are also not the views of Cochrane.”

Although the letter had four signatories, the word “I” inadvertently remained. One of the signatories told me that Wilson wrote the letter and that the first draft was much worse than the final version.

Wilson admitted that he disliked my book and granted himself supreme power. The “views of Cochrane” are Wilson’s views. It was total nonsense that my factual book had views that were not those of Cochrane. What were Cochrane’s views? There were none. Did Wilson believe that the drug

---

<sup>16</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Peter Schwarz fordrejer sandheden](#). Berlingske 2013; 3. september.

industry did not commit crimes, or what? Why did he want to protect the drug industry instead of the patients?

Four days later, Wilson wrote in an email to me that he had sent this letter; that the President of the Danish Psychiatric Association had circulated his letter amongst the Danish professors in psychiatry; that the President had read it aloud at the annual meeting of the Association; and that the President had shared it with a journalist working close to the Danish government (Ole Toft, journalist at Altinget).

I did not see Wilson's email, as I was on holidays in a jungle in Panama and was seriously handicapped in terms of access to electronic media. Incidentally, I detected on the Internet that Toft had published a seriously misleading article<sup>17</sup> on 25 March about me and that the Danish media had run amok over this. I succeeded to locate the server for my emails and found Wilson's email.

On 28 March, I wrote to Wilson and the co-signatories that their letter to the psychiatrists had been interpreted in all media in Denmark such that what they called my "accusations" about the drug industry were false and not shared by my organisation, Cochrane. "This is the biggest disaster in my twenty years with Cochrane. My reputation is in ruins because of your letter. It doesn't matter that my book is evidence-based and has 900+ references. All that matters is that, because of your letter, which you omitted to discuss with me before you sent it, everything I have built up is in ruins. If you had contacted me, which is a rule we have always followed, this disaster would not have happened. People in Denmark are disturbed by what you have done to me and my centre."

Burton included Wilson's letter in the [binder he sent to Counsel](#) (Cochrane's hired lawyer) with [22 attachments](#) on 2 July 2018 in preparation for the show trial against me, but he did not explain that I met with Wilson, Tovey, Grimshaw and Bero in Panama City just before our Cochrane meetings started. During that meeting, Grimshaw apologised that they had not consulted with me before they sent their letter. Wilson did not apologise. He just stared at me with his hateful, killing look, which is so scary that I can still see it in front of me today.

What was also missing in the binder to Counsel was that Wilson and colleagues published a letter in Toft's journal saying that they had been misunderstood.<sup>18</sup> In this letter, they backpedalled and contradicted what they had written to the Danish psychiatrists. They now claimed that they neither supported nor rejected my interpretation of the evidence about the drug industry and the use of psychiatric drugs. They criticised Toft for having written that "the organisation does not agree either with the views Peter Gøtzsche have in his book where he compares the business model of the drug companies with criminal organisations." They said that "We have not at any time expressed any opinion about Gøtzsche's views on drug companies."

This was not true. They wrote to the psychiatrists that "The views contained in this book are also not the views of Cochrane."

This was a blatant example that what Burton sent to Counsel was seriously biased against me.

My repair work was endless, as journalists and others continued to refer to the press coverage in 2014 as "proving" that no one needed to take my scientific work and evidence-based books seriously because my own organisation has denounced them.

Journalists love witch-hunts, particularly if a well-known person is the target, and the press propagated half-truths and blunt lies. Being a journalist, Wilson knew this, and it is clear that his intention was to harm me.

---

<sup>17</sup> Toft O. [Gøtzsches organisation tager afstand fra hans psykiatri-udtalelser](#). Altinget 2014; 25. marts.

<sup>18</sup> Grimshaw J, Bero L, Wilson M, Tovey D. [Cochrane: Gøtzsche-artikel var upræcis](#). Altinget 2014; 8. april.

Two Danes complained to the Cochrane leadership about the way it had disavowed me. Wilson and colleagues explained to one of them that they recognised that the mere listing of an affiliation does not mean that someone is speaking on behalf of the affiliated institution. I agree, but this was window dressing. For me, this principle was suspended. Wilson *always* interpreted my affiliation as speaking on behalf of Cochrane. His incessant attacks on me were malicious and done in bad faith, especially because he turned a blind eye to so many others within Cochrane, including his own staff, who were doing the same thing.

The minutes from the centre directors' meeting in Panama stated that the letter to the psychiatrists was widely reported in the Danish media, sometimes in a distorted and sensational fashion that interpreted the letter as "the Cochrane leadership denouncing not only what Peter had written about psychiatric drugs, but Peter himself and his book, 'Deadly Medicines and Organised Crime,' which the Society had not mentioned in their letter, but which the Cochrane leadership mentioned in their reply ... there was general agreement of the principle expressed by Peter that the co-chairs, the CEO and the Editor-in-Chief, and their staff, should not communicate with national institutions, authorities or others in matters that could be potentially damaging without first consulting with the responsible local Cochrane Centre or Branch Director."

Wilson violated blatantly and routinely this decision during the rest of my time with Cochrane. The only reason why the minutes from the centre directors' meeting dared go against Wilson was that he had only been CEO for 1.5 years. He had therefore not had enough time to take full control over the centres and to demolish them.

### **2015: My article in the Daily Mail about psychiatric drugs**

On 18 September 2015, Wilson, his deputy, and the two co-chairs uploaded a [statement](#) on the Cochrane website that was irrelevant and very harmful for our work at the Nordic Cochrane Centre. My critics took advantage and constantly referred to it and other, similarly damaging messages from Wilson.

#### Statement from Cochrane

Cochrane issues a statement distinguishing between opinions expressed by individual contributors and organizational policy statements.

Cochrane has a long tradition of vigorous, open scientific debate that we cherish, and we want to play a constructive role in the current debate on the evidence relating to the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs, resulting in better health decision-making and patient care. However, Cochrane's ability to take part in the debate is damaged if we are falsely perceived to have taken a partisan position that we do not hold.

In his article 'Prescription pills are Britain's third biggest killer' (MailOnline, 15 September 2015) Professor Peter Gøtzsche writes that: 'As an investigator for the independent Cochrane Collaboration – an international body that assesses medical research – my role is to look forensically at the evidence for treatments' and goes on to make a series of statements about the effects of psychiatric drugs and their use by doctors in the UK. These comments could be misconstrued as indicating that Professor Gøtzsche is conducting this work on behalf of Cochrane.

Cochrane wishes to state unequivocally that the views Professor Gøtzsche has expressed on the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs are not those of the organization. As primarily a research organization Cochrane does not make clinical recommendations and we have not done so on this issue.

Professor Gøtzsche is an experienced researcher and he is the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre. He is free to interpret the evidence as he sees fit. He has an obligation, however, to distinguish sufficiently in public between his own research and that of Cochrane – the organization to which he belongs. There is a wide range of views within Cochrane on the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs, of which Professor Gøtzsche's is one.

Lisa Bero and Cindy Farquhar, Steering Group Co-Chairs  
Mark Wilson, CEO  
David Tovey, Editor in Chief

The statement made it more difficult for me to do my advocacy work, e.g. in the European Parliament about wider access to clinical trial data. My critics abused it to claim that the Cochrane leadership had disparaged me, or worse: UK professor of psychiatry, David Nutt, said during a lecture he gave in New Zealand in February 2018 that I had been kicked out of Cochrane. He was seven months premature, but perhaps an insider had told him about what was coming.

Cochrane could not disavow my conclusions about psychiatric drugs and the drug industry, as the organisation could not have any “views” on such issues that carried more weight than those of a researcher who had studied them in great detail. Cochrane lost credibility when its leadership didn't protect its own researchers against vexatious attacks.

Five days after Wilson's statement was uploaded, *BMJ* published a news item, “Cochrane distances itself from controversial views on psychiatric drugs.”<sup>19</sup> I was quoted for saying that “The Cochrane leadership cannot ‘distance itself’ from my views on psychiatric drugs, as they are evidence based and thoroughly documented in my new book. Further, as it is clear in my article in the Daily Mail that the views I express are my own, people have started wondering why the Cochrane leadership publishes a statement that confirms the obvious.”

I was punished by Wilson even though I wasn't responsible for what had happened. I was invited to write the article, which came out two weeks after I had published my psychiatry book where all the evidence was. I explained that, based on data from published and unpublished sources, psychiatric drugs might be the third major killer after heart disease and cancer. No one could seriously doubt that this was my own conclusion.

The editor insisted that I added the statement about my role in Cochrane, which was even written by the editor. It was inserted by him so late in the process that I am not sure I saw it before it came out in print. This is the reality of dealing with the media and their fast turn-arounds. There was nothing about my Nordic Cochrane Centre affiliation. I had tried my best to avoid Wilson's radar, but it always found me.

Wilson's statement was “eminence-based,” as he had added the names of the Editor-in-Chief and the co-chairs. In philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's booklet, *The art of always being right*, this tactic is called “Appeal to authority rather than reason,” which is the antithesis of Cochrane.

This was spurious: “Cochrane's ability to take part in the debate is damaged if we are falsely perceived to have taken a partisan position that we do not hold.” No reasonable person would

---

<sup>19</sup> Wise J. Cochrane distances itself from controversial views on psychiatric drugs. *BMJ* 2015;351:h5073.

think that Cochrane, as an organisation, had taken any position in relation to psychiatric drugs, or that any damage for a debate had been caused.

If “Cochrane” meant these four people, or, more likely, just Wilson, it escaped me why they would want to debate psychiatric drugs, about which they had no expertise. And on what basis should the views of four eminences reflect the views of the 30,000 contributors to Cochrane?

Cochrane “wants to play a constructive role in the current debate” seemed to imply that my contribution wasn’t constructive, although I was the only one who had studied the science.

The Cochrane statement harmed Cochrane, as many people believed that Cochrane preferred to support the status quo, the psychiatrists’ guild interests, and the drug industry.

The Cochrane excellencies wrote that my article could be misconstrued as indicating that I had conducted my work on behalf of Cochrane. This was also a red herring. It was clear that my article was based on my new book, which I mentioned just before my forensic work for Cochrane.

When the Cochrane leadership uploads a personal attack on one of its highly respected researchers on the Cochrane website, it has a chilling effect on all Cochrane contributors, fearing public humiliation and a lack of loyalty from their own institution.

The excellencies talked about my “views,” but they were not views but facts and conclusions based on solid scientific evidence. By casting doubt over the credibility of my research, Wilson gave the drug industry a helping hand. Spokespeople from the drug industry repeatedly announced, with delight, that my own organisation disavowed me, and yet, Cochrane never objected to these characterisations. Wilson was unwilling to defend me despite my enormous contributions to the charity.

Only two weeks later, Bero, who co-signed the Cochrane statement, contradicted herself. During the Annual General Meeting in Wien she mentioned it was OK to say that your expertise had been derived from your Cochrane work. That was exactly what I did. However, some are more equal than others in Cochrane.

During this meeting, Carl Heneghan, Director of the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine in Oxford, said that Cochrane’s actions towards me were very damaging. People are encouraged to say they come from Cochrane, but the policy doesn’t say that if we don’t like what you say, you will get a renunciation on the website. Nobody wants to risk that. Don’t say you are part of Cochrane unless you talk specifically about a Cochrane review.



Carl Heneghan



Tom Jefferson

Tom Jefferson ended the session by asking: “Can we all just agree that people like Peter are welcome in the Collaboration? ... We are what we are because of people like that. And the contribution that nobody speaks of that Peter made was the opening of the regulatory assessments.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to him, his obstinacy, his Nordic Cochrane Centre and the Ombudsman. Can we all agree on that, please?” Big applause. [The Cochrane leaders looked uncomfortable](#).

## **2016: Proper use of the Spokesperson Policy while Wilson was on holidays**

In May 2016, we complained to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) over the way the agency had handled the suspicion – raised by Denmark – that the HPV vaccines might cause serious neurological harms. Julie Wood, Wilson’s Head of External Affairs and Communications, wrote to me on 10 June that I had broken the [Cochrane Spokesperson Policy](#) because we had caused confusion as to whether our views were official Cochrane views:

“We have had two requests from journalists asking us to clarify if this is official Cochrane policy ... It is such a shame we are now in this unnecessary position and I find it disheartening that we are back in this same position again.”

Disheartening, when there weren’t any problems? Wood was pressured by Wilson to behave in the same ruthless way as himself towards me. She became one of the many staff members that didn’t last long in his office.

I asked Wood for the requests from the two journalists, and it turned out that she (or more likely, Wilson) had [tampered with the evidence](#) in her letter to me. None of them were confused about whether our complaint over EMA was “official Cochrane policy.” I replied that I wondered why she had asked me to “rectify this situation yourself as soon as possible,” as there was nothing to rectify. My main arguments were:

1) The policy is about “expressing your opinion about Cochrane-related issues.” Our letter to EMA was not about a Cochrane-related issue but about administrative issues in an EU institution.

2) As we did not express “personal views,” our letter cannot cause confusion as to whether it expressed “an official Cochrane view.” Our letter was factual and questioned EMA’s handling of a safety issue.

3) When we interpreted the facts, we used expressions such as “We agree” (10 times) and “We believe” (6 times). No one can genuinely be in doubt that these are the interpretations of those who signed the letter. Furthermore, the policy states: “How to make clear that you are speaking in a personal capacity is a matter of local custom and culture ... we should be transparent about associations with Cochrane.”

4) The use of the Nordic Cochrane Centre’s letterhead makes it clear that our letter cannot be an official view of the Cochrane Collaboration.

I also wrote that I found it bizarre that the Cochrane leadership told me that I should not use the letterhead of our centre and my title for official letters, which were a result of the work I did at the centre. “My job description includes an obligation to share knowledge with the rest of society, including participation in public debate, which the letter to the EMA is an example of.” Moreover, the policy stated that “we should be transparent about associations with Cochrane.”

I noted that, when people contacted the Cochrane leadership with questions with a malicious intent about the status of my work and about whether the Cochrane leadership agreed with me,

---

<sup>20</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Jørgensen AW. Opening up data at the European Medicines Agency. *BMJ* 2011;342:d2686.

Cochrane should not go after me but support my work, also because I tried to serve the public - Cochrane's primary constituency - as well as I could, which our letter to EMA exemplified.

I provided some comments from Carl Heneghan that underlined why we must change the policy from being an instrument used to punish Cochrane collaborators publicly to one that tells people to stop asking silly questions of the Cochrane leadership, the answers to which they know already before they pose them.

I reminded Wood that she had written to me that Tovey and herself had reviewed our letter to EMA and were sympathetic to our arguments (which proved that Wilson dictated what she should do). The obvious thing to do would therefore not be to ask me to add a disclaimer to our letter to EMA, which she had requested, even though it was too late, as we had already sent it and it was out in the public domain, but for the CEO's office to issue an official statement in support of our letter:

"If the CEO's office is not prepared to do this, I think a public explanation is required, as people might wonder why it is not in Cochrane's interest to support a well-documented letter coming from a Cochrane centre that points out that the European Medicines Agency is doing substandard work when it comes to protecting public health."

We did not get any such support. Wilson was not interested in protecting the patients but went all in to accomplish his character assassination of me by denigrating my research and myself.

But as Wilson was on holiday, the two co-chairs of the Governing Board, Lisa Bero and Cindy Farquhar, responded. They agreed with me and wrote to the complainants, on 28 July 2016:

Dear Mrs. Wind-Mozley and colleagues,

We are writing in response to your email of 22 July 2016 regarding the complaint to EMA authored by Gøtzsche, Jørgensen, Jefferson, Auken and Brinth. Two of the five authors are affiliated with the Nordic Cochrane Centre; Gøtzsche also lists his affiliation with the University of Copenhagen. The letter does not state that it was prepared on behalf of Cochrane and it is not an official statement of the Cochrane Collaboration.

As members of civil society, the authors are free to send comments to the European Medicines Agency and, to our knowledge, they are using their correct affiliations. We suggest you raise your concerns regarding the letter in a public forum, so they can be transparently discussed.

This was exactly how Wilson should have responded to all the inappropriate complaints about my use of my Cochrane affiliation. But Wilson always used the opportunity to disavow me.

By now, I was so fed up with all Wilson's attacks that I consulted with several people, including the German Cochrane Director Joerg Meerpohl. I wanted to publish a disclaimer once and for all on our website, so that Wilson could no longer hunt me down:

"Statements made by people employed by or affiliated with the Nordic Cochrane Centre do not represent official views of the Cochrane Collaboration as an organisation, unless this is explicitly stated. They represent the interpretation of the science or the views of those people who make them."

Wilson rejected my proposal. He would lose his opportunity of punishing me if we uploaded a disclaimer. He also told Meerpohl that he should have referred me to himself directly and not

engaged with me at all. This was abusive. Centre directors were free to consult with whomever they liked, including other directors.

After Wilson had returned from his holidays, he, Wood, and the co-chairs wrote to me that I had broken the policy. Without a single counterargument, or discussion of my arguments, or even referring to concrete text in the policy in his support.

Facts meant nothing to Wilson, which is how tyrants operate. A tyrant has unlimited power over other people and uses it unfairly and cruelly. Everyone was a puppet to Wilson and those who protested got excommunicated from his church, which he called the Cochrane Community.

The fact that the co-chairs allowed Wilson to overrule their correct decision, for no good reason and without any evidence in his support, demonstrated Cochrane's huge problem with governing issues. In the binder the board received from Cochrane's law firm, the letter where the co-chairs declared no wrong-doing on my behalf had been omitted.

This fraud must have been deliberate, also because I wrote to the two co-chairs on 26 April 2018 that it was important for my case. But Burton had replaced Bero as co-chair, which meant Wilson was now in total control of the board and could have his position favoured over mine and that of his former co-chairs in the show trial against me.

### **2017: Irish TV about the HPV vaccines**

On 6 January 2017, Wilson declared that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy again, in relation to a TV programme on Irish National TV (RTE) about the HPV vaccines. He argued that I should have used my university affiliation and criticised that I had written letters of complaint to RTE and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) using my centre's letterhead without making it clear that our submission to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) represented my views and not those of Cochrane. He was also dissatisfied that I had not consulted with Julie Wood beforehand in relation to the public statements I made to RTE in the interview.

Wilson even complained that since I had used the centre's letterhead in my "personal capacity and not as the Nordic Cochrane Centre" this "would still lead RTE and the BAI to assume that the complaint is coming from the Nordic Cochrane Centre and not you personally."

This was totally bizarre. The complaint *did* come from the centre, as I *was* its director and I represented it and was interviewed as such. If I could not represent my centre, who could? And I was not interviewed about a personal issue but about our science, which was carried out at the Nordic Cochrane Centre. Moreover, Wilson's Spokesperson Policy said that "we should be transparent about associations with Cochrane," but now he contradicted his own policy.

The Irish journalist had a hidden agenda, which was to discredit the scientific work researchers from my centre did on the HPV vaccines. There was nothing I could have done to prevent her from calling me Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre. And I had no reason to contact Wood, as I was not in doubt about anything.

Wilson asked me to honour his requirements. As he did not ask for a reply, I did not reply. This was totally ludicrous.

But I can see what this was all about. We had criticised EMA's mishandling of the Danish authorities' worry about possible serious neurological harms caused by the HPV vaccines, and

Cochrane had a highly prestigious review under way of these vaccines, which declared one year later that “The risk of serious adverse events is similar between control and HPV vaccines.”<sup>21</sup>

### **2018: The letterhead was more important to Wilson than why young people died**

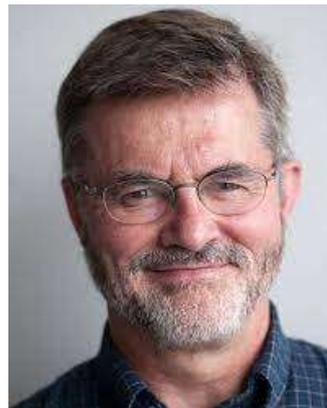
My expulsion started with a trivial issue. The Spokesperson Policy apparently “clarifies who can represent, write and speak officially on behalf of Cochrane and how they should do it,” but it does not clarify anything. Cochrane’s own hired [lawyer concluded](#) that the policy was too ambiguous to be accurately interpreted, but that meant nothing to Wilson when I was involved.

Notwithstanding, two physicians sent complaints to Wilson in the spring of 2018 criticising that I had used my centre’s letterhead for “non-Cochrane” purposes.

I had asked a US funder to help getting very important data out in the open about why so many young people with schizophrenia had died in a study. I explained that published accounts were inconsistent; that I had not received any clarification from the primary author of the study, Wenche ten Velden Hegelstad; and that the editor who had published the study had declined to publish a letter from me and Robert Whitaker, asking for details about the deaths. Whitaker is an award winning American science journalist and book author. He is the publisher of [Mad in America](#), which has 3 million visitors every month.



Peter C Gøtzsche



Robert Whitaker

I noted to the funder that, "We believe funders have an ethical obligation to ensure that information, which is of great importance for public health, and which has been collected in the funded study, gets published. That would be a great service to psychiatry, the patients, and everyone else with an interest in this vitally important issue. When young people who are receiving antipsychotics die, we need to know why they died in order to reduce the risk of death in future."

I asked the funder, in case they did not have this information, to obtain it from Hegelstad, as “Anything short of this would be unethical in our view, and we are convinced that patients with psychotic disorders agree with us.”

---

<sup>21</sup> Arbyn M, Xu L, Simoons C, Martin-Hirsch PP. [Prophylactic vaccination against human papillomaviruses to prevent cervical cancer and its precursors](#). Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2018 May 9;5(5):CD009069.

This would seem straightforward, but in his two emails to Wilson, psychiatrist Edwin Fuller Torrey, Associate Director of Research at the funding institute, wrote:

The Cochrane Collaboration's credibility rests upon the assumption of objectivity ... Such objectivity appears to be very much in doubt for Dr. Peter C. Gøtzsche who identifies himself as the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre and as the Protector of the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark. This organization promotes the belief that auditory hallucinations are merely one end of a normal behavioural spectrum, thus casting doubt on whether schizophrenia actually exists as a disease, and that hearing voices are caused by trauma in childhood, for which there is no solid evidence. Given such clear lack of objectivity, I personally would not find any Cochrane publication on mental illness to be credible.

Torrey also wrote that the Hearing Voices Network encourages people who are taking antipsychotics for their schizophrenia to stop taking their medication, and that, "It is very difficult to imagine how anyone with these views could possibly be objective regarding a Cochrane study of antipsychotics, thus impugning your credibility which is your most important asset."

This was bizarre. How can my objectivity be "very much in doubt" when I merely ask for the number of deaths and details about their causes? Furthermore, contrary to Torrey's assertions, there is solid evidence that psychosis is related to childhood traumas, with a clear dose-response relationship.<sup>22 23</sup>

Torrey also drew the false conclusion that because I am protector of the Hearing Voices Network, no Cochrane publication on mental illness is credible. Here is an excerpt of a comment the Network sent to me:

We take issue with Torrey's attempts to discredit the Hearing Voices Movement to add leverage in his attempt to discredit Professor Peter Gøtzsche. In 2016, we invited Gøtzsche to be protector because of his pioneering work regarding psychiatric research. We are honoured to have him as our protector.

We believe that Torrey's comments to Mr. Wilson regarding Gøtzsche being our protector to be bordering on the ridiculous when he attempts to discredit the whole Cochrane Collaboration.

We would ask that Torrey stops using the network as a platform to insult a respected professor along with the Cochrane Collaboration. We would also suggest that he considers apologizing for his disrespectful remarks about voice hearers.

Torrey also criticised that the network encouraged people taking antipsychotics to come off them. However, their effect is so small that it is not relevant, whereas the risk of permanent and serious

---

<sup>22</sup> Shevlin M, Houston JE, Dorahy MJ, et al. Cumulative traumas and psychosis: an analysis of the national comorbidity survey and the British Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. *Schizophr Bull* 2008;34:193-9.

<sup>23</sup> Varese F, Smeets F, Drukker M, et al. Childhood adversities increase the risk of psychosis: a meta-analysis of patient-control, prospective- and cross-sectional cohort studies. *Schizophr Bull* 2012;38:661-71.

brain damage is dose related.<sup>24</sup> Many people improve when they come off their drugs and are much more likely to return to their normal lives if they are not put on drugs in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

How did Wilson react to this nonsense from a US psychiatrist? He told me that by using my centre's letterhead and my title and by saying "we" and "our" when I asked for information about the deaths, it would reasonably lead any reader to assume that the request was from the Nordic Cochrane Centre and that the views expressed were those of the centre. I had therefore failed to abide by the Spokesperson Policy.

Wilson wanted to write to Torrey that, "I apologise for any confusion in this regard." This would be like saying, "I apologise on behalf of this fool who unfortunately is one of our centre directors." So, one bully wanted to apologise to the other bully when the person between the bullies had done nothing wrong. Only Torrey should apologise, for his disdainful and arrogant remarks. The setup was ridiculous, and even Cochrane's own hired lawyer [didn't find I had broken the policy](#), neither in this case, nor in another similar case that was also about psychiatry, but such trifles don't matter for bullies. There was no problem, but Wilson invented one.

I replied that I had not broken the policy; that it was clear that the request came from the centre, which Wilson acknowledged; that I was authorised to speak on behalf of my centre; and that my views were shared by my fellow researchers. Moreover, my letter was not a public announcement; it was a letter, which no one else but Torrey would ever see.

After I had been expelled from Cochrane, Ryan Horath from Chicago, who is both a lawyer and an IT expert, wrote on a blog:<sup>26</sup>

"Cochrane leaders became obsessed about Gøtzsche using Nordic Cochrane letterhead ... JESUS CHRIST, WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU PEOPLE. A researcher is making inquiries about the suppression of information regarding children who died in a clinical trial and everyone is worried about what letterhead it is written on? ... Even worse, it is clear the outrage over use of Cochrane letterhead is feigned outrage, as this was a private letter ... Was Fuller Torrey confused about whether the letter represented Cochrane's views? Apparently not ... Instead, Torrey argued that Gøtzsche was not 'objective' and this damaged Cochrane's reputation – something totally different ... So, Cochrane leadership's use of this complaint in its case was misleading. The complaint is about one thing, and they used it as evidence of another (false allegation). That is how kangaroo courts operate."

I wrote twice to the Norwegian Research Council, which had also funded the study, and the Council asked a Norwegian researcher, Ingrid Melle, to give me the data I had requested. I found it strange, considering the very high death rate of 12% in very young patients with schizophrenia, that the authors had not discussed whether the deaths could have been caused by the drugs and had not reported which drugs the patients were on.

Melle did not give me the data I requested, and in her reply, she asked me: "Since you are writing with a Nordic Cochrane Centre letterhead, I'm curious if Cochrane has any plans for doing anything in this area?" Melle's inappropriate comment about my centre's letterhead, which I used in all official correspondence, seemed to have been part of a concerted effort among psychiatrists with the aim of removing me from my job as Cochrane director.

On 11 October 2018, one month after my expulsion, Robert Whitaker published [The Cochrane Collaboration has failed us all](#). In his article, he wrote:

---

<sup>24</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly psychiatry and organised denial](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Whitaker R. [Anatomy of an epidemic](#), 2nd edition. New York: Broadway Paperbacks; 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2019.

If you read Counsel's report, it's clear that the complaints about Gøtzsche's "behaviour" were very much tied to his vocal criticisms of psychiatry. Gøtzsche's ouster is a betrayal of the scientific enterprise, which is a collective social good. By failing to resolve this dispute in some other way, Cochrane failed in its mission to serve as a collaboration of scientists that would dare to challenge conventional medical wisdom. Counsel praises Gøtzsche for the "rigour and quality of his academic work," and as an "academic of very considerable eminence." His scientific work is of the very kind that burnishes the image of the Cochrane Collaboration as a first-rate scientific organization.

The most "recent issue" related to psychiatry was a complaint from psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey. The complaint highlights this dynamic within psychiatry: You can be a leading figure who makes public statements that are belied by science but consistent with psychiatry's disease model ideology, and you will suffer no harm; yet psychiatrists and other medical professionals who publicly prick holes in that story do so at great professional risk.

Gøtzsche wanted to know why so many young people had died in a study of schizophrenia. Torrey responded not by providing such information, which would be the expected thing to do if you were following the dictates of good science, but by making a "complaint" about Gøtzsche to Cochrane CEO Mark Wilson. Torrey's letter was clearly unhinged, and hardly one that the CEO of the Cochrane Collaboration could be expected to treat as serious, but Wilson, in a letter to Torrey dated March 2, 2018, basically threw Gøtzsche under the bus:

"Thank you for your message. Professor Gøtzsche is an experienced researcher and he is the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre. In the light of similar confusion about whether his personal views represented those of Cochrane, the organisation's senior leadership issued a statement in September 2015 (<http://www.cochrane.org/news/statement-cochrane>) which continues to apply. As an organisation we stand by the evidence we publish in the Cochrane Library and Cochrane.org, and by the policy positions and statements we make. We accept there is always a danger that researchers and clinicians, policymakers, the media or the general public could conflate the views of individual Cochrane collaborators or the different parts of what is a global and dispersed organisation as those of Cochrane itself. We therefore insist that Professor Gøtzsche and all Cochrane office holders must abide by Cochrane's Spokesperson Policy (<https://community.cochrane.org/organizational-info/resources/policies/policies-all-members-and-supporters/spokesperson-policy>), which specifically allows Cochrane collaborators freedom to engage in scientific debate whilst protecting Cochrane's reputation and avoiding the type of conflation that you point to. As we made clear in the statement, Professor Gøtzsche is free to interpret the evidence as he sees fit. He has an obligation, however, to distinguish sufficiently in public between his own research and that of Cochrane – the organisation to which he belongs. There is a wide range of views within Cochrane on the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs, of which Professor Gøtzsche's is one. I am interpreting your message of yesterday as a formal complaint that Professor Gøtzsche has not made this distinction clear in this case. If that is correct, I will need to share it with Professor Gøtzsche in order for him to have the opportunity to respond to it. Can you please confirm, therefore, that you have no objections to me doing this?"

This is the moment in this dispute that perhaps is the most embarrassing of all for the Cochrane Collaboration. A director of the Cochrane Centre wants to find out more about the deaths in a long-term study of psychotic patients, and the CEO of the Collaboration, rather than finding that pursuit worthwhile, finds reason to think it might provide cause to expel the director from the collaboration, and all because he receives a letter from an American psychiatrist that, even if one viewed it charitably, could best be described as disrespectful toward a users' group, ignorant of the

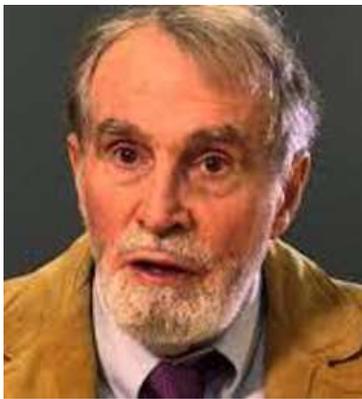
science, and silly in its threat to now see all Cochrane reviews related to psychiatry as lacking “credibility.”

You would think that all members of the Cochrane Collaboration would be red-faced upon knowing of this exchange.

The medical literature - and this is particularly true of the literature in psychiatry - is already seen as corrupted and biased due to the influence of pharmaceutical money and guild interests, and now the public will have reason to question whether the work of the Cochrane Collaboration is similarly untrustworthy.

The Cochrane Collaboration needs to remember that it serves the public, and this decision to oust Gøtzsche fails to fulfil that obligation.

One would think that a CEO of a huge organisation would have more important things to do than to write long, elaborate letters to foolish people instead of ignoring them. But Wilson was only CEO by name; he did not behave like one.



Edwin Fuller Torrey



Anton Loonen

### **2018: My expert testimony in a Dutch double homicide trial**

The other complaint to Wilson in the spring of 2018 was about an event two years earlier, in February 2016. I was an expert witness for the defence in a double homicide trial where a mother, Aurélie Versluis, killed her two children under the influence of a depression pill. I emphasised in my written statement that professional malpractice played a crucial role for the homicides. Versluis developed clear symptoms of akathisia, an extreme form of restlessness and inner turmoil that predisposes to suicide, violence, and homicide, but her psychiatrists told her to continue with the pills even though she became suicidal.

I commented on a report written by another expert witness, Professor Anton Loonen, a clinical neuropsychopharmacologist. I found many scientific problems with his report, which I described. There was nothing personal in this.

However, in the middle of the proceedings, Loonen suddenly handed out a defamatory note in Dutch. He questioned my qualifications - although this was entirely up to the court to decide upon - and wrote that I was controversial and had made several assertions about the scientific stature of psychiatry that went beyond my field of expertise. He called it tragic and stated that Cochrane had distanced itself from my psychiatry book. He also wrote that he suspected I suffered from a

mental disorder that made me seriously disinhibited and advised that I be examined by a doctor to protect myself against myself.

Loonen also contacted the press and called another expert witness, Dr Selma Eikelenboom-Schieveld, a charlatan in a newspaper. She complained to the Regional Disciplinary Court, which found his statements offensive and unfair. Loonen was reprimanded by the court, which furthermore found that he, as a judicial expert, in an improper way had wanted to influence the criminal process, which involved particularly serious and punishable offenses. The Public Prosecution Service concluded that Loonen's offense was criminal.

Loonen realised he was in trouble. A month after the proceedings, he sent me a curious letter where he noted that Versluis had been convicted and sentenced to nine years in prison followed by preventive custody. He mentioned misunderstandings in court and postulated that his defamatory note about me - which he had openly distributed in court - was confidential. He disagreed with me about akathisia and considered himself an expert on this. He ended his letter by saying he was anxious to learn why I called psychiatry a pseudoscience and that he would like to invite me to dinner to discuss the background of my "ideas and feelings." The letter opened with "Dear Peter" and ended with the "warmest regards." Really? The atmosphere between Loonen and me was ice cold. I was appalled by the fact that he contributed to Versluis' harsh sentence by writing a poor report to the court where he claimed, contrary to the evidence, that her medicine could not have caused her to kill her children.

Four months after the court proceedings, I went to Holland again to lecture about psychiatry as invited speaker at an international scientific meeting in Leiden. Loonen tried to prevent me from speaking. He wrote to the organiser referring to the court proceedings and claimed that I, for personal reasons, had violated the requirements of confidentiality as an expert witness by making public Loonen's report to the court. That was not true. I had not made his report public. I had shown the defamatory note he suddenly presented to the court to a journalist, which I was entitled to do because there was nothing confidential about it.

I complained to the University of Groningen where Loonen worked about his professional misconduct. They ignored me for two years. It took six emails before they reacted. I was informed that the Dean had arranged a meeting with Loonen and had told him that his conduct was inappropriate and that he must prevent the university from suffering possible damage because of his behaviour.

I also lodged a complaint with the Regional Disciplinary Tribunal in Groningen, which dismissed my complaint, and to the Dutch Medical Association, which refused to handle my complaint with the excuse that I was not Dutch. This upset one of my Dutch friends, Dr Dick Bijl, so much that he involved a lawyer who filed a complaint against Loonen at the Central Disciplinary Tribunal on my behalf. This was in January 2018. The verdict came 19 months later: "The Central Disciplinary Tribunal deems the statements made by the doctor [Loonen] about the complainant's person inappropriate and - insofar as they should be seen as a beginning of a diagnosis – unsubstantiated ... The Regional Disciplinary Tribunal wrongly ignored this in its decision."

These more recent events explain why Loonen suddenly attacked me in the spring of 2018, two years after the court case. He submitted a complaint about my use of my centre's letterhead, which was vexatious and should have been treated as such by Wilson. Loonen also asked whether my centre endorsed my expert report, and whether my conduct was in line with Cochrane's policy on conflicts of interest.

I replied to Wilson that the Spokesperson Policy was about ensuring that what people say or write is not misinterpreted as if it is official Cochrane policy. As there could be no doubt that I had addressed a lawyer on behalf of myself, I had not broken the policy. And since my expert report was written for the court and had not been made public, it could not be a matter of how the public perceived it. Given that I was approved as expert witness because of my work at the Nordic Cochrane centre and served as its Director, I found it natural to use its letterhead. Even if I had written my statement on a blank sheet of paper, my affiliation with the Nordic Cochrane Centre would have been obvious, and there was no doubt that what I stated in my expert report was my own opinion. This is what being an expert witness is about.

However, as usual, Wilson actions were not influenced by common sense and fairness. He threw out all rationality and wrote to me that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy again.

## **5 My election to the Governing Board in January 2017 and Wilson's silly micromanagement**

Since I wanted to see change within Cochrane, I ran for a seat on the Governing Board in late 2016. I also thought that I would acquire some immunity towards Wilson's many inappropriate attacks on me if I became a board member. My [election statement](#) did not pull any punches and included this:

Generosity, enthusiasm and a feeling of ownership of decisions are of utmost importance for continued survival and prosperity of the Cochrane Collaboration. I therefore feel it is essential that we continuously consider very carefully whether we have the right balance between what has always been essentially a bottom-up organisation and the recently introduced pyramidal management structure. Even after 23 years, I still see the Collaboration much more as an idealistic grassroots organisation than a business, and we could face deep trouble if we start losing some of our many thousands of unpaid volunteers.

I have talked to many people who have been active in the Cochrane Collaboration for many years and who have expressed concerns about recent developments in our organisation.

The CET [Central Executive Team, Wilson's staff in London] should be serving those people who do the bulk of the work, above all the authors and editors of reviews, but also those working in centres and methods groups. It has been noticed, however, that the CET has assumed a much more directive role, which has had unfortunate implications for the collaborative spirit and potentially for essential future contributions from those who are the backbone of the Collaboration and are creating the royalties without which there would probably be no Collaboration. Although there was general agreement that more direction and uniformity in the quality of our output was needed, and also that the CET has contributed importantly to this, many people feel that the process has gone too far.

In line with this, people have wondered why so many of our resources go to salaries of centrally employed staff and they worry that volunteers may stop contributing their time for free when they see that people with similar tasks get a salary. This worry is particularly pronounced in the methods groups. People have also pointed out that the more employees there is at the CET and at affiliate offices, the more work they will create for themselves and others, which might not always be productive.

The Cochrane Collaboration is now run much more as a business with a brand than it was just a few years ago. Many see this as problematic, as it could lead to a lack of funding, e.g. from governments that might think we could do well on our own. The *raison d'être* for the

Collaboration is research, not business, and this is also the reason why people still want to support us. Our brand has no value of its own but derives its value from our research.

Some centre directors have argued strongly against the CEO's idea that it should no longer be a priority for centres to carry out methodological research or to be strong in research and thereby be good examples for others to follow. In my experience, one cannot be a good science educator without being a researcher oneself, and I believe this view is pretty universal, e.g. also at our universities.

Methodological research and development are at the heart of our collaboration; it is vital to keeping the work of the Cochrane Collaboration relevant and trustworthy and at the forefront of EBM [Evidence-Based Medicine]. Without research being at the top of our agenda, our organisation might lose its ability to attract top researchers and it might also have negative implications for the willingness of governments to support Cochrane centres financially.

I agree with many of these pretty widespread concerns. One issue that has come up repeatedly is: Should the CET decide on what centre directors should be doing when it doesn't provide their salary and when the centres are on government finances, which come with expectations that might not always coincide with what the CET would want?

I believe we need to avoid that too much decisive power becomes concentrated at the CET and, if elected, I will work on refocusing on our central values and aims.

Although we are an evidence-based organisation, I feel that we have sometimes made decisions in the past without looking for or respecting the evidence. I also feel we are often too inward-looking when we make policies. One example is: If we asked the public whether they are happy that our current policy states that up to half of the authors on a Cochrane review are allowed to have financial conflicts of interest in relation to a drug company whose product is being evaluated, I am pretty certain what the answer would be. We are here to serve the public and I therefore feel we should be more outward-looking when we make policies.

Therefore, an important guiding principle for me if I should become elected will be: What does the public want from us? I believe it is a risk for all idealistic organisations that their policy making can become too consensus-based and too self-serving because growth and sustainability of the organisation may become a more prominent objective over time than the original one. There will always be influential people who will protest loudly if they fear their privileges might be taken away from them, particularly if these are pecuniary, and we have seen this happen several times in the Cochrane Collaboration when we tightened our commercial sponsorship policy. Conflicts are unavoidable but they can be used positively if handled professionally with a clear focus on our aims.

I believe Cochrane reviews generally have become too detailed, too cumbersome to carry out, and too difficult to read. In some reviews, there are more than 50 different outcomes, and the authors dutifully analyse and report all these outcomes despite the fact that we know that outcome reporting bias is very common, not least in published reports of drug trials.

If elected, I would advocate simpler reviews, with much fewer outcomes that focus on what is relevant and important for patients. A difference on an elaborate, composite scale rarely says much about whether the patients' lives have improved, particularly not when side effects are regarded as a separate issue and are very often downplayed or omitted altogether from published trial reports.

Cochrane had become highly ineffective. Due to its obsession with detail, some reviews were longer than four normal size books. My election statement went directly against virtually everything Wilson stood for. But I was supported by many influential people, for example:

Iain Chalmers, Cochrane's founder: "Your election statement is great ... Best wishes in promoting the progressive agenda you have outlined."

Jim Neilson, former Steering Group co-chair: "I strongly agree with your concerns about the change of culture in the Cochrane Collaboration (as expressed in your election address). You have my vote. Good luck!"

Andrew Moore, Cochrane editor: "Many congratulations. I agree that there are dangers ahead with the current direction of travel. Your views reflect mine. It would be terrific if there were reasons to engage, rather than considering disengaging."

Paul Garner, Cochrane editor: "I think you will be much more effective than Corbyn [Labour Party leader] in the UK! Onward!"

I became elected in January 2017, with the most votes of all 11 candidates. This illustrated the widespread dissatisfaction with Cochrane's leadership because I was the only candidate that questioned their actions.

Wilson cannot have been thrilled that the only person who criticised him received the most votes. Initially, the board did not intend on disclosing the voting results to the public, but in reminding the board that Cochrane was supposed to be an open and transparent organisation, I ensured that the votes became known. I suspect Wilson intervened and demanded that the votes should not be made public. However, already in 2005, I suggested at a centre directors' meeting that votes should be made public, and the directors endorsed this.

I was one of the few people who were not afraid of Wilson, but, as I soon discovered, my board membership would not protect me from Wilson's witch-hunt. Wilson controlled the board totally.

It is only now, four years after my election, that I am able to see clearly why Wilson hated me so intensely and therefore developed his master plan of the final solution of the Gøtzsche question.

A month after my expulsion, my wife, Professor and Clinical Microbiologist Helle Krogh Johansen, who has published many Cochrane reviews with me, pulled no punches:

You are not the problem but the symptom of a sick organisation that no longer promises democratic rules of play. An organisation, which, due to lack of vision and intellectual power, has shut itself down, and perceives it as persecution and harassment when someone who is much more visionary and able to do things, they cannot do themselves, constantly steps on the sore toes. Mark Wilson and his management team have ended up in the wrong place. The Peter Principle of being promoted until the level of incompetence fits so well with the whole management and Wilson. He is a little bookkeeper who does not understand his organisation at all, and then he ends up with navel-gazing and a feeling of being persecuted by everyone who can do more or see more than himself.

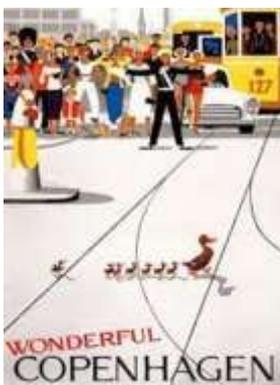
He has assembled a team around him that cannot cope either with their tasks. Then you need to get rid of the wisest, so that you may again appear to be an oracle. It is so embarrassing.

Cochrane was created by those who can now no longer be involved. As things are currently, it is light years better to be outside than inside an organisation that focuses on image, brand, and output, because anyone with a small exam from a business school can figure this out.

My wife's analysis rang a bell. Wilson saw himself as our employer, although he didn't pay for us. He wanted us to set targets according to his strategic plan, to tell us what to do, and to report back to him whenever we changed anything in our plans during a calendar year. It was micromanagement to the extreme.

Wilson also required ludicrous targets like the number of guidelines issued by the National Board of Health we would influence, which was beyond our control. We may set a target about how many times we will help ducklings cross the road with their mother, but if there are no ducklings, we will miss our target.

I had a meeting with Wilson on 10 April 2015 in Copenhagen where he said: "I was very unhappy about your report for the Nordic Cochrane Centre." He referred to the silly system he had introduced allowing him to fulfil his bookkeeping role by checking if the centres had obtained their annual targets. I wrote in my report that most of the items were not a priority for us and that we therefore did not have targets for them. These targets were *really silly* and the embarrassing system was later abandoned, but as always, I was punished for having been more visionary than our Great Leader.



Gerald Gartlehner

I explained to Wilson that, some years ago, we had a lot of targets in our strategic plans but gave up on it when we realised that they weren't helpful for our work. It was much more important to grab the opportunities as they arose.

Wilson was outright hostile, particularly when I said that I was not a bookkeeping type of person, but a pioneer who broke new frontiers all the time. Perhaps he felt jealous, perhaps not. He did not have much self-insight.

Wilson thought it was a problem that very few people turned up at our workshops about how to do Cochrane reviews. Since many people turned up in Australia, we surely must have a problem. It didn't move him the least that many people attended our workshops in the beginning of our existence; or that many people were now so good at it that they didn't need to attend workshops, or even held their own; or that I had documented and published in the Cochrane Library that we produced an extraordinary number of Cochrane reviews, compared to the size of our country.<sup>27</sup>

In December 2021, I discovered that the article I had published in 2011 in the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* about review production in Cochrane did not seem to exist any

---

<sup>27</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Tendam B, Clarke M. [Review production in The Cochrane Collaboration - where is it happening and why?](#) Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2011;Suppl 1:16-9.

longer. I therefore [uploaded it](#) on my website. It showed that Cochrane centres were essential for review production. As Wilson had systematically undermined the functions, reputation and the credibility of Cochrane centres to consolidate his grip on power, I suspect the disappearance of my article was related to this.

Wilson said it wasn't good for Cochrane that I bathed in blitz light about other things than marketing Cochrane reviews. It didn't impress him that my international visibility and influence meant that I gave a lot of good publicity to Cochrane even when the journalists weren't interested in those Cochrane reviews Wilson's unit press released and put spin on. Being a journalist, he should have appreciated this, but he told me I should focus on Cochrane. I talked about academic freedom and the impossibility of fending off journalists who wanted to report on our research, which was often ground-breaking. Should I say, "Sorry, I cannot talk to you, as this is not about a Cochrane review?" I also told Wilson that I could not employ good people if their work was only about marketing Cochrane reviews.

I felt Wilson tried to bomb me back to where I started my career, as a drug salesman in the drug industry, which was very humiliating. He wanted me to sell Cochrane reviews, no matter whether they were good or bad, just like when drug reps sell pills.

When I said that [my book](#) about deadly medicines and organised crime in Big Pharma had sold 4,000 copies in just the first eight weeks in its [German translation](#), Wilson looked very uncomfortable. He didn't congratulate me, just sat with his stone face staring at me, which he did when he was unhappy.

### **Serious tampering with meeting minutes in Genève in 2017**

Already at my first Governing Board meeting, in Genève in April 2017, it was revealed how corrupt Cochrane had become under Wilson's leadership. I suggested to introduce a complaints procedure ensuring that the person complained about had an opportunity to respond before the Cochrane leadership took any action. Wilson was vehemently against introducing any such procedure and was involved with writing the minutes. The [board ended up approving minutes they knew were untruthful](#) in a way that benefited Wilson's views, although they were not shared by the board.

Sorry, but I have to say that this reminded me of Hitler. People who dared oppose him or called for a fair process were either killed immediately or slowly in a concentration camp. And his generals dared not tell him that his strategy was wrong, even though Hitler made many disastrous decisions during the war. Cochrane's generals also kept silent about Wilson's disastrous decisions, apart from me.

This mismanagement ended in total chaos, after three months of hefty email discussions, and it was a violation of the [Charity Commission rules](#): "The minutes should record exactly what was agreed, particularly for important or controversial decisions."

Because Wilson was strongly opposed to introducing fairness, I was worried that the minutes might not be correct. I therefore sent my own minutes to the board the same day we had discussed this explaining that we decided that complaints must be forwarded to the person complained about so that this person could participate in the process; otherwise, the risk of damage was high.

As the minutes from Wilson and the co-chairs did not reflect what was discussed and what was agreed, I wrote again and noted that I found it outrageous that the minutes said that, "the manager is not obliged to share all material from the complainant with that individual." I argued

that if the complainant writes that the person under attack should not be allowed to see the complaint, the Cochrane leadership should ignore the complaint, as this is what fairness is about, in courts of law and elsewhere.

Several board members made similar observations to mine. Catherine Marshall wrote that she did not recall any reference to “Cochrane's Charter of Good Management Practice” at the meeting and was therefore surprised to see it included in the minutes. She noted that we had agreed that the person should see the complaint and be given the opportunity to comment.

The Austrian Cochrane Director Gerald Gartlehner agreed with both of us and added that the wording was problematic: “It was clarified” hid behind a passive voice. I asked who had clarified and added that the co-chairs, Lisa Bero and Cindy Farquhar, by their manipulations, had shown a remarkable lack of respect for the other board members.

The co-chairs responded that, “We are happy to be criticised for missing some of the detail of the discussion, but I do not accept that they were misleading or inaccurate.” I asked whether it was Wilson who had used the word “I” in this sentence and therefore was responsible for the misleading minutes but got no reply. Wilson was in total control of the board. This was the second time, the word “I” inadvertently remained in a message that was supposed to come from several people in the Cochrane leadership (see page 15).

The co-chairs trivialised the issue by saying that the part of the minutes “I” (and others, but they focused on me of course, as they had undoubtedly been directed by Wilson that they should do so) had criticised as being “inaccurate” (as they called it) “related to 6 lines of 14 pages of minutes from a two day meeting.” I responded that the issue was not about the number of lines, but about the content that remained highly misleading even after we had pointed it out. I asked the co-chairs again to clarify who the author was of the misleading sentences, which they never did.

Despite all our efforts, the minutes related to this item continued to be misleading, and on 19 June, Lucie Binder, Senior Advisor to the CEO, asked the board to approve the overall minutes for the whole meeting. The next day, Gartlehner protested that “it was clarified” sounded as if the board had clarified it, which was not correct. He also found the statement about not disclosing all the material to the person complained about very troubling, and Meerpohl agreed that we had not discussed this.

The co-chairs complained that their previous comments had been selectively cited, and Bero wrote that she was deeply disturbed that the board “is considering making a change in policy based on the personal experience of one of our board members.”

This was familiar to me. I was the messenger for everything that was wrong in Cochrane and Cochrane’s scapegoat. I replied that, “It was NOT a question about complaints about me, it was a general question that addressed senior people in Cochrane. The co-chairs try to make this a personal matter, which unfortunately is a common management strategy when managers face trouble because of their own actions and try to put the blame on others.”

Gartlehner, supported me and noted that, 70 years ago, Austria and Germany had a justice system that used exactly the approach described in the minutes. Accuse people of wrong-doing and not provide the complaint material to them, denying the accused the opportunity to properly defend themselves. He also emphasised that this issue was not about me but about a general principle of fair treatment and justice.

The co-chairs responded that they had heard from board members who were disturbed by Gartlehner's email. "We need to keep our correspondence civil. We are taking this matter seriously and will deal with this off-line with Gerald."



Joerg Meerpohl



Nancy Santesso

Ironically, this was exactly the type of behaviour Gartlehner warned about. Big Brother is watching you and will take action as appropriate, with no witnesses. The co-chairs gave themselves more authority than they had. Deputy Canadian Cochrane Director Nancy Santesso found Gartlehner's point civil and so did I. I wrote that if a scientist invents something that did not happen and writes about it, we call it fraud, and the minutes contained bits that did not happen.

I also noted that I considered Binder's voting procedure illegitimate, as voting cannot make right what is obviously wrong. I could see no reason why the co-chairs should deal with Gerald offline, which looked like a punishment and yet another sign that the co-chairs favoured secret processes, just like their dictator, Wilson, did. I recommended the board to read Kafka's novel *The trial* and some of Dostoevsky's novels about secret processes: "We are highly sensitive to such tendencies in Europe, given our recent history. It is not only Gerald. It is all of us."

The whole mess got worse and worse. The co-chairs could no longer handle the chaos caused by the untruthful statements Wilson had inserted in the minutes. They stopped it all with the remark: "This matter is closed." The co-chairs used the majority argument, although falsehoods do not become truths because a majority approves them as part of a greater package of minutes: "7 people voted in favour of the revised minutes ... Therefore, the minutes ... were approved." We were only 13 board members, so it was the minimum majority possible.

For the historical record, I have uploaded the many email exchanges in [Appendix 6](#) to my report to Cochrane's lawyer, which are very revealing.

Gartlehner and I requested that our comments be included in the minutes, which continued to be seriously misleading and conveyed the impression that only two people had objected to them, although the truth was that five board members were highly critical. Despite the many protests, the minutes remained untruthful, demonstrating the total lack of respect Wilson and his two loyal servants had for other people:

### **13.2 Complaints procedure**

In response to a question from PG about how complaints about him have been handled, it was clarified that if a formal complaint is made about a member or members of Cochrane the following should occur:

- The individual must be informed and sent the original complaint. However, to protect individuals making complaints, the complaint is not to be disseminated to the media, posted on blogs, social media, etc.
- The manager does not have to disclose all the material from the complainant with the individual. For example, emails between individuals of Cochrane who are investigating the complaint.
- That we must follow the principles of the procedure that Cochrane already has for dealing with conflicts (located in the Cochrane's Charter of Good Management Practice and related policies).
- Cochrane members must also inform their manager of conflicts or potential conflicts.

**Post-hoc notes on this item:**

Co-Chairs: *When the draft minutes were circulated to the Board for comment, members contributed to a lengthy discussion by email about item 13.2. The Co-Chairs revised item 13.2 based on the email discussion of the Board. The final minutes, with the revised item 13.2, were then sent to the Board for a vote for approval. Although the version of 13.2 minuted above received majority approval by the Board members – and is therefore the official record -, the following two Board members asked for their disagreement with item 13.2 to be recorded in the minutes:*

Peter C. Gøtzsche *Several Board members have pointed out that the minutes are misleading in relation to item 13.2. I did not raise a question about myself but about how complaints about senior people in Cochrane should be addressed by the CEO and the co-chairs. It was not agreed that the complaint should not to be disseminated to the media, posted on blogs, social media, etc. In my view, irrelevant complaints that have not been submitted in good faith should sometimes be exposed when the case has been dealt with, just like we expose cases of scientific fraud. Several Board members have objected to this sentence: “The manager does not have to disclose all the material from the complainant with the individual.” This was not discussed and not agreed to at the Board meeting, and it would not constitute a fair process. The sentence, “For example, emails between individuals of Cochrane who are investigating the complaint,” was not discussed or agreed to either. The minutes say that we must follow the principles of the Cochrane's Charter of Good Management Practice. Several Board members have noticed that this was not discussed and not agreed to and that the Charter furthermore does not cover what we discussed at the Board meeting. We discussed the New Zealand Principles of Natural Justice and the Board was sympathetic to these.*

Gerald Gartlehner: *GG states that he does not agree with the sentence “The manager does not have to disclose all the material from the complainant with the individual”. I think that this statement should be more nuanced and needs further clarification so that it cannot be used in a misleading way against Cochrane.*

Considering what went before, the final minutes from the Governing Board only time in Genève were ridiculously brief on this point and only said:

## “5. Correspondence

Discussion about correspondence relating to Peter and his work.

Peter agrees to follow the Spokesperson policy.”

My first board meeting demonstrated beyond any doubt that Cochrane, which we had treasured so much, was now a dictatorship. It took Wilson only two years to demolish the pluralism and democracy we had in Cochrane. He behaved like the rulers in Orwell’s *1984*, where there was a Ministry for Truth, which Wilson in Cochrane called “Trusted evidence.” When he became CEO, he changed Cochrane’s logo and introduced this slogan, which we were all forced to have in our letterhead:



Trusted evidence. Informed decisions. Better health.

### Nordic Cochrane Centre

Rigshospitalet, Dept. 7811

Blegdamsvej 9

2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel: +45 35 45 71 12

E-mail: [general@cochrane.dk](mailto:general@cochrane.dk)

[www.nordic.cochrane.org](http://www.nordic.cochrane.org)

A man who was widely distrusted and lied habitually, talked about trusted evidence. The irony could hardly be greater, but Great Leaders do not have humour. If they had, they would not be Great Leaders, as they would realise how ridiculous they were.

## 6 Cochrane on industry payroll

In the early days of Cochrane, some doctors took their bad habits with them and obtained funding from drug companies to their Cochrane activities. Most embarrassing of all, some reviews were directly sponsored by the company whose product was being reviewed!

During the Cochrane meetings in Melbourne in March 2003, Drummond Rennie, co-director of the US Cochrane Center’s San Francisco branch and a deputy editor of *JAMA*, said that industry funding would be a catastrophe for Cochrane.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Peter Tugwell, a member of Cochrane’s Steering Group, was comfortable with reviews being funded by companies with an interest in the treatments being reviewed. Rennie thought that industry funding would destroy Cochrane’s credibility while Tugwell argued that Cochrane might not survive without industry support.

My view has always been that if Cochrane cannot survive without industry funding, it should die. I was [quoted](#) for saying that, “No other sources of bias even come close” to that of industry funding, and that I would propose a prohibition on industry sponsored reviews at the next Cochrane meeting six months later, in Barcelona.

My talk in Barcelona was the only time I was invited to give a plenary talk at the annual Cochrane colloquia, but I could hardly be ignored this time. I have listened to numerous plenary talks at the colloquia that were so politically correct that they could not offend anyone, but they were also terribly dull. In December 2021 I asked Tom Jefferson if he had ever been invited to

<sup>28</sup> Moynihan R. [Cochrane at crossroads over drug company sponsorship](#). *BMJ* 2003;327:924-6.

speak at a plenary session at a Cochrane colloquium. He had not and he had always found that the various guest speakers were like people coming from another planet.

In Barcelona, a Spaniard was supposed to argue in favour of industry funding, but he was so busy with praising his Latin colleagues that there was no time left to say anything about industry funding. It was really farcical.

I had fought vigorously against industry funding ever since Cochrane started in 1993. It was a pretty lonely fight, but I refused to give up and was supported by Drummond Rennie.

When I brought the issue on the agenda for our centre directors' meeting in Providence in USA in March 2005, the discussion became heated and unpleasant. We agreed that there should be no direct funding of Cochrane Centres or branches by commercial sources, but as usual, Cochrane moved *very* slowly and there was also a loophole: "Direct funding currently in place to Centres would be allowed to continue but should be phased out over a five year time period. If a Centre or interested party believes that an issue of new funding contravenes the above principle, or where there is some doubt, these matters will be referred to the funding arbiter."

Very little happened the next seven years. In December 2012, I wrote to the co-chairs of the Steering Group, Jeremy Grimshaw and Jonathan Craig, reminding them of a report I had sent to the Steering Group ten months earlier where I provided a detailed criticism of the Commercial Sponsorship Policy, which was unclear, outdated by many years, ambiguous, and difficult if not impossible for Cochrane's funding arbiters to work with.

I noted it sent a pretty bad signal to the outside world and offered to draft a new policy. I also noted that several people outside Cochrane had contacted me in 2012 with their concerns. Some of them had sent a request to the Gynaecological Cancer review group that people with close industry ties should not be allowed to write a Cochrane review about the HPV vaccines.

One month earlier, Cochrane researchers on Novo Nordisk payroll had created problems for us. One of my PhD students worked on a Cochrane review of diabetes drugs when he discovered that Novo had left out deaths in their publications that were listed in the clinical study reports. He published this serious omission,<sup>29</sup> but the Novo paid people were afraid it might influence their good relations with the company! This spoke volumes about why we needed to be clean.

I said that the issue was urgent and reminded the co-chairs that I was the driving force nine years earlier in Barcelona for getting industry funding out of Cochrane. I asked to become involved in the redrafting of the Commercial Sponsorship Policy and called for a firm deadline.

The co-chairs' reply was typical for Cochrane: "With a policy as important as this one, you would appreciate the need for appropriate consultation and debate throughout the organisation." This could have been written in a manual for politicians about how to stall unwelcome proposals. A proper translation of this is: "Industry money is nice to have; many get them; we don't like getting enemies; so we hope we can bury the issue." Were 19 years of waiting (since the foundation of Cochrane in 1993) really not enough?

Nothing substantial happened. Wilson had joined Cochrane three months earlier, and the co-chairs copied him in, which did not help. At the meeting we had in 2015 in Copenhagen, he didn't understand why I had complained about our revised Commercial Sponsorship Policy a year earlier, or why the Brazilian Cochrane Director, Alvaro Atallah, had supported me in this. Atallah wrote that if we let conflicts of interest (COI) issues compromise our core values, the whole Collaboration might crumble and disappear in a few years. Moreover he said:

---

<sup>29</sup> Schroll J. Deaths in trials should always be reported. *BMJ*. 2013 Jul 4;347:f4219.

“The world is vast, and I am certain that there are still plenty of qualified, competent researchers and individuals out there, without any COI, that could perfectly replace any of our directors, editors or authors that have COI. If we lose our credibility, we do not deserve to survive.”

I dared not say anything about industry funding at my first Governing Board meeting, but at the second, in Cape Town in September 2017, I suggested to change our policy so that no one with financial conflicts of interest would be allowed to become author on a Cochrane review that evaluated that company’s product.

The board was very positive towards my proposal, but co-chair Cindy Farquhar was not. At one point, I left the room and went to the toilet to cool down a little because she treated me very rudely when she argued why I should not be involved with my own proposal. Despite Farquhar’s protest, I was nonetheless asked to draft a proposal for a new policy.

I came home from South Africa on a Friday and sent my proposal on the following Monday. It was very easy and took me only an afternoon to write a better policy. My report to the board started thus:

“According to the Cochrane Collaboration’s ‘Commercial Sponsorship Policy’ from 8 March 2014, ‘Cochrane Reviews must be independent of conflicts of interest associated with commercial sponsorship and should be conducted by people or organizations that are free of such bias.’

However, according to clause 3 under ‘Commercial funding of reviews or authors’ in the policy, authors of Cochrane reviews are allowed to have financial ties to the manufacturer of the product being reviewed provided there are more authors who do not have such conflicts. This is clearly in contradiction to the statement just above, and the Governing Board therefore agreed at its meeting 11-12 Sept 2017 that the policy needed to be changed. Peter Gøtzsche, who had raised the issue at the Board meeting, was asked to write a draft for an amended policy to be sent to the other Board members for comments.”

The Cochrane “killing me softly with his song” behemoth machine immediately went into action. Behind this song was a [story](#) of a young female musician struggling to find the space where both her voice as well as her ideas would be respected and not expropriated whenever it best suited the purposes of the others.

Already the next day, co-chair Martin Burton put a stick in the wheel. Burton effectively prevented anyone from writing to other board members that they liked my proposal by claiming that we had agreed that I should:

“Propose a process for how we are going to move forward. Who will we consult with, in what order, over what timescale? How will we get input from the community? How will we gather information about the pros and cons of changing the policy and how will we evaluate the potential impacts of changes?”

I had no recollection that we had agreed to this. It was my clear perception that the board, apart from the co-chairs, were happy that I had offered to redraft the policy.

It took two months for the board to agree on a “Proposal for a process for reviewing Cochrane’s ‘Cochrane policy on commercial sponsorship of Cochrane Reviews and Cochrane Groups’ of 8th March 2014.”

Twenty months after I had redrafted the policy, a [document was circulated](#) in Cochrane called “Conflict of Interest Revision Project – Progress Report, May 2019.” But almost two years of hibernation was still not enough:

“The COI Project Team will draft a recommendations paper and revised policy based on the literature review, the survey results and the interviews with stakeholders ... We cannot aim to implement a policy that eliminates COI entirely; nevertheless consumers, clinicians, funders, and policy-makers should be confident that our policy is robust and in-line with industry best practice. In addition to instilling confidence in our users, we must find a way to continue to allow people from diverse academic, clinical, and cultural backgrounds to contribute to the production of Cochrane reviews.”

What this means for people who keep their feet on the ground is: “We want to have the cake and still eat it.” And in line with industry best practice? What did that mean? Industry does its best to render influential doctors financially conflicted!

Over two years passed before the world saw the ground-breaking result of Cochrane’s elaborate processes. On 3 December 2019, Cochrane’s Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Karla Soares-Weiser announced Cochrane’s “new, more rigorous ‘conflict of interest’ [policy](#).” So, what was it exactly?

“The proportion of conflict free authors in a team will increase from a simple majority to a proportion of 66% or more.”

It is amazing it took Cochrane so long to arrive at this “rigorous” policy. In order to get there, they examined conflict of interest policies from 33 healthcare-related organisations, including journals, guideline developers and research funders; conducted an open, online survey resulting in contributions from nearly 1000 Cochrane members; and interviewed 16 internal and external stakeholders.

The HealthWatch Newsletter commented on this depressing result in the article, “[Cochrane policy change raises eyebrows](#),” and said:

Dr Peter Gøtzsche was a co-founder of Cochrane but his membership was terminated in 2018 after he was outspoken about his concerns over commercial influence in the organisation. On hearing of the new policy he tweeted: “Simmelweis never told doctors to wash one hand only. Wash both.” He went on to say: “Cochrane’s ‘strengthened’ commercial sponsorship policy is like eating the cake and still having it. It is like going from declaring to your spouse that you are unfaithful half of the days in a month to ‘improving’ by declaring that from now on you will only be unfaithful one third of the days.”

I had tweeted about Semmelweis, and a year later, I became so provoked that I fired two more tweets:

Do declarations of doctors’ financial conflicts of interest related to the drug industry make matters worse? The doctor charlatan: “Now that I have declared to my wife that I am unfaithful sometimes, I might as well screw any woman who passes by.”

The doctor charlatan: “My financial conflicts of interest related to the drug industry do not influence my judgment, as I work for so many companies.” So, prostitution is okay, as long as you have many customers, right?

## **7 The emperor embarrasses himself in front of his entourage**

During the board meeting in Lisboa in March 2018, Wilson and I had a separate meeting in relation to the complaint from Torry. Wilson also wanted to discuss Loonen and a question sent as a tweet.

I brought Meerpohl and my Deputy Director, Karsten Juhl Jørgensen, to the meeting as witnesses and also recorded the meeting, as I knew Wilson could not be trusted.

The minutes were produced by Sarah Watson, Cochrane's Head of Finance & Core Services, and they looked like a verbatim transcript of what was said. However, Wilson must have tampered with the minutes. Important bits that were incriminating for Wilson had been left out.

I asked Wilson for an amicable solution. I also asked him to remove the damaging statement about my 2015 Daily Mail article on Cochrane's website. To no avail.

After 27 minutes, Wilson said I had broken "the Spokesperson Policy and additional undertakings." This was correctly quoted in the minutes, but the start of my reply was omitted: "Wait a minute, Mark, I did not break the Spokesperson Policy." This is significant for what happened soon after when Wilson embarrassed himself totally.

A little earlier, I had said that there cannot be separate rules for me and not everyone else. I added:

"In Genève [a year earlier], the board agreed at a meeting where you weren't present that I could use the letterhead and Cochrane affiliation as long as I make it clear if there was anything to be in doubt about that these are my personal views." The minutes were seriously misleading:

"In Geneva, the board agreed that I could use the letterhead and Cochrane affiliation as long as I make it clear these are my personal views."

The omissions, "where you weren't present" and "if there was anything to be in doubt about" are essential. As there never was any doubt about whether views were my own, Wilson could no longer claim that I broke his Spokesperson Policy when I used our centre's letterhead. Thus, I had taken his most important punishing instrument away from him. But Wilson ensured not only that the minutes from the Genève meeting became untruthful but also that the current minutes became untruthful.

Two days after this meeting, Burton took Meerpohl and me aside, one by one (not together, which was his way of exerting power), and tried to convince each of us separately that we should not bring up the Spokesperson Policy during the board only time in the afternoon (where Wilson was not allowed to participate and therefore could not control the board). Burton told me that there was no reason to discuss it because I had broken the policy, to which I replied that this wasn't correct and that he didn't know the details. I did not tell him that we regarded him as the mouthpiece of his master.

I considered following Burton's advice, but I would then need Wilson to agree to tone the whole thing down. I had a brief meeting during the coffee break with Wilson and I took Meerpohl with me as my witness. I asked him again for an amicable solution where he didn't deliberately undermine me to my enemies, as it was harmful for my Cochrane work. I asked Wilson again to remove the damaging statement about my 2015 Daily Mail article. He didn't respond but just stared at me, in his typical "my eyes could kill you" way.

I tried again to be friendly with him and said that he and I needed to work together to achieve good things for Cochrane. Still no positive response but continued staring. I asked Wilson why he always wanted to punish me instead of protecting me. He replied that it was not about that, but I had broken the Spokesperson Policy, which he would need to point out.

Wilson said that I had admitted two days earlier that I had broken the policy. I explained that this was not the case; I only said that my deputy and I interpreted the policy differently to him.

Wilson totally lost his temper. He shouted, called me a liar, and said that I couldn't be trusted because I changed my views all the time. He pointed his finger at me and hammered his hand very

hard on the table, took Meerpohl firmly by the shoulder and said that, as he was there, he could confirm I had admitted I had broken the policy.

Meerpohl said he could not remember anything to that effect, and when I rang my deputy a little later, he confirmed that I had not said I had broken the policy.

Wilson's outburst was witnessed by two other board members, Janet Clarkson and David Hammerstein, and Clarkson considered intervening, as she was very disturbed by Wilson's physical aggression.

Meerpohl was so shocked about Wilson's bullying behaviour - management by fear where Wilson tried to threaten him into agreeing to something that wasn't true - that he brought it up during the board only time. When Gartlehner said there had been several other instances of Wilson bullying people, he was quickly stopped by Burton. I found it interesting that the two people on the board who wanted to talk about Wilson's bullying came from countries, Germany and Austria, that in the recent past had seen what terror can lead to.

Wilson never apologised that he called me a liar. Meerpohl humbly approached the tyrant to get on good terms with him. I would not have done that. In the early 1930s, naïve politicians in the German Reichstag including the supreme leader, the Chancellor, thought they could control Hitler by being kind to him. Wilson then apologised to Meerpohl for his behaviour. Me, he just avoided, as if I was already non-existing.

A week later, Wilson sent an email to the co-chairs where he claimed that I had said that the board had decided in Genève that the special requirements for me about the use of my letterhead were no longer in place. I never said this. I drew a logical conclusion. Since I could use my letterhead freely, there could not be any additional requirements when I used the letterhead. Meerpohl supported me: "There are minutes from the 'board only' time to confirm."

I did not realise at the time that when a citizen has pointed out a tyrant's wrongdoing and logically and calmly has caused him to lose his temper and embarrass himself totally in front of his Court, the citizen must disappear. This explains what came next.

## **8 Wilson escalates the conflict to the extreme**

Only a month later, Wednesday afternoon on 11 April 2018, Wilson escalated our longstanding conflict to the extreme in a long email with 10 attachments. He claimed I had broken the Spokesperson Policy in relation to my letter to the US funder.

The misinformation continued. Wilson mentioned the meeting in Genève, which he did not attend, but where he seemed to have manipulated the minutes, and said that the board had not rescinded the special requirements. No, they had not because it was not needed!

There were other problems. As my deputy only had the centre affiliation, should we then give two different addresses when we were interviewed together? Moreover, as all my work was produced at my centre, then why mislead people by using my university affiliation?

When I got my professorship, it was announced in *Cochrane News* as the appointment of a "Cochrane Professor" Moreover, "We see it as an academic recognition at the highest level of the important work of The Cochrane Collaboration".<sup>30</sup> This showed that it was impossible to separate my professorship at the university from my job at the centre. Wilson might also have taken this message down; I could not find it, not even in a Google search or by searching on "Cochrane Professor" on the Cochrane website.

---

<sup>30</sup> Jones L. "Cochrane professor" appointed in Denmark. *Cochrane News* 2010;49:5.

After he had had six weeks to think about it, Wilson requested that I respond to his allegation within two days because he wanted to reply to Torrey before the weekend. This wasn't possible, as I was occupied both days.

Wilson threatened to deregister my centre, and thereby jeopardise the future of my staff members and other Cochrane people in Denmark, if I failed to comply with the Spokesperson Policy and his other requirements, which had been rescinded at the board meeting in Genève a year earlier after I had protested against them.

I found Wilson's threat of collective punishment, which could have rendered about 50 people jobless for no good reason, appallingly poor leadership. Tyrants operate this way. If they cannot find the resistance fighter, they will punish the whole family.

I informed the Governing Board immediately about this because the board had decided three weeks earlier at the part of the board meeting in Lisboa where Wilson wasn't allowed to be present that his allegations that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy and my reply would need to be considered by the board before he took any action. I reminded the board of its decision and asked Wilson to respect it.

After the weekend, I replied to Wilson and asked the board for its views. I expected that the dispute would be settled by the board. Perhaps I should have known better. In a well-functioning charity, this would have happened, but Cochrane's board was totally dominated by Wilson and his close ally Burton, who had become co-chair a year earlier.

Wilson became enraged that I had challenged his omnipotence by involving the board. According to the 330 pages Burton sent to Cochrane's law firm three months later, Wilson said: "In my view this is an outrageous email. I addressed the email only to Peter as his line manager, so his response (without copying the Board) is unacceptable. It is also full of factual inaccuracies."

Wilson lied blatantly. There was nothing outrageous in my email. There were no factual inaccuracies, and Wilson didn't give a single example, which is typical for his evidence-free manipulations. I also wondered what he meant by "without copying the Board," as I wrote to the board.

Wilson complained that I involved the board, but board members are entitled to write to each other, which Cochrane's own lawyer confirmed at the completion of his investigation.

Since this is crucial for the whole story about Cochrane's demise, I shall go into detail with the events. On 11 April, I sent a draft of my reply to the board and Wilson to three board members who were on my side (Hammerstein, Meerpohl and Gartlehner) and asked for their comments.

Joerg replied that he fully supported my draft and that he was quite surprised that we had never received the minutes from the meeting in Lisboa on this issue. He agreed, that giving me a deadline of two days and threatening to close down my centre was not appropriate, nor should it be acceptable behaviour to the board.

David agreed that I should notify the whole board of this and the lack of time to respond. He was shocked by Wilson's response to a criticism written by someone probably motivated by the pharmaceutical industry and felt that this kind of response would encourage Cochrane members to inhibit themselves and impose self-censorship.

On 11 April, I wrote to the board and Wilson that Wilson had sent a very unpleasant email in which he threatened to close my centre:

Our CEO Mark Wilson sent an email to me today, on 11 April, of 13,504 words that takes up 42 pages when transferred into a Word document, with 10 attachments. In it, he claims that I have

broken the Spokesperson policy. A psychiatrist complained about me to Mark on 1 March. After having had six weeks to think about it, Mark sent me this email, which I received at 2.22 p.m. today while I was very busy working on something else, with a deadline.

Mark wants me to respond to his allegations during the next two days because he wants to reply to the complainant during this time. This is not due process. I am totally occupied the next two days and cannot meet Mark's extremely short deadline. Danish TV is filming us at the centre all day tomorrow, a bit ironically, considering the complaint, because they are very impressed with our work related to helping psychiatric patients, and Friday I shall be in Stockholm and lecture.

Most importantly, it was decided at the Governing Board only time on 23 March in Lisboa where we discussed the Spokesperson policy and issues related to it, that Mark's allegations and my reply would need to be considered by the Board before Mark takes action, if any is required.

I therefore remind the Board about this decision and at the same time ask Mark to respect the Board's decision. I shall respond as quickly as I can, which means next week.

Mark, in his long email, threatens to deregister my centre, if I fail to comply with the Spokesperson policy (and many other requirements, which are specific for me and do not apply to anyone else in Cochrane). I find this very disturbing. I firmly believe I comply with the policy in relation to this psychiatrist's complaint and there cannot be separate rules for me that do not apply to others in Cochrane. Finally, it is totally out of proportion to threaten me with closing my centre, which you will see when you see my reply to Mark's allegations.

I copy Mark on this boardprivate email.

David Hammerstein responded to my mail and copied the board but not Wilson:

This is very disturbing news indeed and I hope it will be resolved satisfactorily as soon as possible. I am worried that the social perception of the independence of Cochrane could be tarnished by this action by its CEO. We all know that the pharmaceutical industry and its lobbies, both visible and covert, are reacting aggressively to articles and books about the gross over-medication and overprescription of psychiatric drugs. Your publications and public appearances have been particularly effective in sparking a very necessary public debate concerning this harmful practice not justified by most scientific evidence. If Cochrane is perceived as being influenced by these defensive campaigns by industry, even if they are carried out by people with no apparent direct financial interests, the reputation of Cochrane could be seriously harmed. I seriously hope this does not happen.

Wilson and Burton did not bother the least about the consequences for Cochrane. I must be exterminated. Basta.

The same day, Martin Burton replied to everyone: "May I respectfully ask that Cindy and I be given some time to address the issues raised in this e-mail, and to respond after that? I am about to go on holiday (from early tomorrow until next Wednesday, 18th April). I promise that Cindy and I will talk as soon as possible and will then write an e-mail to everyone."

I asked Hammerstein, Meerpohl, and Gartlehner for advice: "I see in Martin's email a high risk of more manipulations with the Board. This is not an issue for the co-chairs but for the whole Board. What should we reply to Martin? Martin is clearly the soldier of Mark Wilson; he is anything but neutral. We must stand up now. Should I write: That this is not an issue for the co-chairs but for the whole Board and that no one should do anything before they see my reply to

Mark's email. And then you can write: we agree? Should I ask Nancy [Santesso] to support us? David, should you call Gladys [Faba] and ask for support? Should I call Janet [Clarkson]? I think so.

There were three more board members who more or less shared our views. Thus, at this time, 7 of the 13 board members, a majority, were opposed to what was happening.

Gerald replied: I would wait and see how it develops. The issue is Mark's behaviour and not your alleged violation of the Spokesperson Policy. If Martin does not follow-up on this issue after his vacation, I'd be happy to write an email to ask about it. It might make sense for you to have private conversations with Janet and Gladys in the meantime.

The next day, I explained to my supporters that David and I thought we should not respond to Burton's email, but that I should send to the whole board and Wilson what I had written in relation to his ill-founded allegations, which I did not need any permission from the co-chairs to do.

On 16 April, I sent Wilson's two draft replies, with my comments inserted, and other relevant documentation, to the board and Wilson, and asked for the board's views on these matters.

Wilson had received a complaint about a seminar we advertised for psychiatrists about withdrawing psychiatric drugs. Surprisingly, he did not find that I had violated his Spokesperson Policy, as he wrote: "The seminar was not an official Cochrane event, nor was it publicised as such." He must have had a bad day, or a glimpse of reason had penetrated his clouded thinking.

On 16 April, Rae Lamb wrote to us: "Hi Peter. Please can you stop copying me in on these matters - if they relate to your role as a Centre Director then it's a matter for you and the CEO to work through and if you are dissatisfied with that process then you should come to the board. In the meantime we should not be involved as you are potentially compromising our ability to fairly and independently look at any concerns you might subsequently raise. I have purposely not opened or read the latest attachments or considered in any depth your earlier emails for the reason I have just explained."

Tracey Howe replied: "Thanks for emphasizing this Rae. Peter I thought we had clarified this at the Board meeting. Please do not send me any further emails regarding this. This could also be construed as misuse of the list."

Catherine Marshall replied: "I completely agree with Rae. Peter, Please don't send me material relating to your role as a Centre Director. It is really important that the Governing Board is able to be seen as fair and independent and able to consider any subsequent issues."



Rae Lamb



Tracey Howe



Catherine Marshall

This was outrageous. These three women supported Wilson's bullying of me, his control of the board, and a totally unfair and undemocratic process against an elected board member and centre director.

I was left in a catch-22 situation, blatantly against our rules and against what we had agreed to three weeks earlier. Could I write to the board or could I not? I would be punished whatever I did. One of the board members wanted to formalise the process, which Burton happily did. He loved formalising things that could have been dealt with easily and quickly. He turned them into elaborate "processes," which he could control.

David wrote to me, Joerg and Gerald that I should answer Lamb that I was coming to the board precisely because I was dissatisfied with the process being carried out by Wilson.

He added: You have never claimed to officially represent Cochrane: affiliation is not representation. If there is no transparency in the data and arguments being used in the process until the final decision making process, then it is impossible for it to be a democratic process. I have never heard of such secrecy in such procedures. It results in the lack of democratic guarantees of the accused if his only communication is with the accuser. Everything cannot be left to the final stages of a Kafkaesque trial in which neither Peter nor others know all the information or the accusations or the explanations of the defendant.

I replied that it seemed to me that our board was so weak that it would tolerate any amount of bullying and wrongdoing by Wilson including that he violated the agreement he had entered with me – the Memorandum of Understanding – and that we must stop this.

On 16 April, I informed Jefferson (whom I had employed half-time) about the issues. He replied that I was being discriminated against because of my work, which was not challenged. Instead, I was attacked based on the Spokesperson Policy, which was silly. Tom disagreed profoundly with Wilson that my letter to the Stanley Institute was outside the scope of Cochrane. Should I not have asked for the data on deaths in young people? In that case, Tom should not have asked Roche for the full Tamiflu trial data. These data showed that Tamiflu does not have any clinically relevant effect on influenza, in sharp contrast to what Roche had claimed. The Cochrane leaders should have praised Tom for his unusually stubborn persistence in getting the truth out, but they were uncomfortable about this, which had clearly tarnished the drug industry's public image.

Tom added: There never has been and never will be a Cochrane view on XYZ intervention. We follow the evidence and interpret it to the best of our capacity. Having a corporate view is anti-science, like the Church in the Middle ages. I think Wilson should know this. If he does not, he is in the wrong organisation. In his responses, Wilson subtly undermines your actions apologising for the "confusion". In addition, I am APPALLED by the threat of deregistration of your centre.

As I was shocked by Wilson's management by fear, I consulted with several members of the board who agreed with me that it was entirely appropriate for me to contact the board, and they found Wilson's behaviour unacceptable.

This was when all rules were totally broken. The Torrey issue was not even an issue, but I was now up for extermination. Nine days after Wilson's totally abominable email, this process started, no doubt initiated by himself, as I had threatened his control over the board. I found it likely that he acted as an *agent provocateur* by sending an email to me he knew I could not accept and by instructing Burton beforehand how he should react to create a catch-22 situation for me. Why not? Hitler invaded Poland with the excuse that Polish soldiers had attacked Germans, but he had himself arranged this fake attack.

David wrote to me that I had not made a key point clear enough: that affiliation is not representation. My factual relationship with my centre did not mean that I spoke in the name of Cochrane or had ever given that impression.

On 18 April, I sent an email to Wilson only with my comments on his suggested replies to those who had sent complaints to him. I reminded him that, in case we could not agree, the Collaboration Agreement between him and me specified that it was my right to complain to the Governing Board, which would then make a decision. I also noted that he could not send replies to these people without my explicit agreement, as he would then violate our Collaboration Agreement and also cause great harm for people working at the Nordic Cochrane Centre. I ended by saying that I still expected that we could resolve the issues amicably.

I am convinced that Wilson immediately contacted Burton when he saw my email. On 11 April, Burton had told the board that he would be on holidays from 12 to 18 April. But his holidays did not prevent him from intervening promptly.

Less than two hours after I had sent my email to Wilson only, Burton wrote to the board:

“Thank you for your patience in waiting for a response from Cindy and I to the issues that Peter has raised. Since I last wrote there have been a number of e-mails from several members of the Board. These replies have raised some very important issues about the principles of dealing with matters in a way that is fair to all those involved. Peter may I respectfully ask that you consider not sending any further e-mails about the issues, to Board members, at this stage. Cindy and I will be talking with Mark Wilson very soon and we will come back with a specific plan indicating how we believe we should proceed.”

Still on 18 April, I explained to Tom Jefferson what had happened: “It is absolutely appalling what Mark does to me and have done for years now, which is why I will do everything I can to stop him now. He cannot ignore the Board’s decision in Genève although he tries to manipulate even that (‘as I haven’t been explicitly told by the Board to stop whipping Peter, I will continue whipping Peter in public, just like people are punished in Saudi Arabia’). It is outrageous.”

Tom responded: “If it’s of any interest to anyone or use, I am happy to give my views on the record to Mark Wilson (or anyone else) on this witch-hunt.” Tom sent me his views the next day:

“For some time I have been uncomfortable with what I see as a witch-hunt against Peter Gøtzsche. I do not believe this to be personal, at least not at the beginning. I think this attitude which seems to be prevalent in the Cochrane leadership is probably generated more by a fear of the consequences of his work.

I base my views on the observations that Peter’s working achievements have largely been ignored by the leadership. Perhaps his greatest achievement, the opening of the previously secret regulatory world, has gone unremarked in all the (few) official Cochrane functions I have attended. Please bear in mind that some of his previous forays, showing for example that the benefits of breast screening had been inflated are now part of mainstream thinking. Several Kuhnian paradigm shifts, all because of one man.

At present Peter is doing what he has always done: challenging orthodoxy. This time in psychopharmaceuticals and in the psychiatric paradigm. I do not have any particular views on these, but I am worried by the pointed attacks by the Cochrane leadership ...

The Spokesperson Policy is a sensible tool which can be applied when the Collaboration has a corporate view on some topic. It must not be used to try to silence anyone, especially not on the basis of their work. Challenging someone’s work is the way scientists engage and progress

scientific discourse. Attempts at silencing a reviewer on the basis of his/her work reminds me of the tale of the Holy Inquisition and Galileo. Cochrane cannot have corporate views on its reviewers' work ...

The contention that a reviewer can split into two or more *personae*, mentally dividing his/her Cochrane work from the rest of his/her scientific output is also akin to the plot of a Fritz Lang film, with a *Metropolis* full of automata, rather than a vibrant community of scientists and activists ...

I am great admirer of the courage of Peter and all those tree shakers like him who have made Cochrane what it is now. I also need to disclose that Peter's Centre is also funding me to do some more tree-shaking.

Those who use corporate methods to silence scientists attract my attention. They make me wonder what their real motives are. Thus the corrosive seed of doubt is sown. Corrosion needs to be neutralised before it affects the credibility of all of us".

On 20 April, Wilson wrote to me and the two co-chairs of the board:

Thanks for your responses, as requested, on the questions I asked you in my message of 11<sup>th</sup> April in relation to Professor Loonen's letter; and to the draft replies to them which I invited you to comment on. I acknowledge, too, the complaints about me you set out in these replies. I would, however, have expected to have received this response before you wrote directly to the Governing Board last week.

It is clear to me that there is no possibility of agreement between us about your interpretation of and behaviour towards the Cochrane Spokesperson Policy in these cases or in general. Nor is there agreement on the additional requirements pertaining to you that I am applying related to your actions and the Cochrane leadership's responses to those actions since 2014. You refer to decisions by the Governing Board which have not been recorded, nor communicated to me as an executive officer, so I must seek further clarification from the Governing Board. I stand by the draft responses I have written to Dr Torrey and Mr Pottergard as appropriate, want to reiterate to you that you do not have the right to impose a veto on what communications I send to them or anybody else, but I confirm that given the seriousness of the differences between us I will not send these responses until the Governing Board has considered the matter.

I have therefore concluded that all of these issues should be referred to the Governing Board, and as a result copied the Co-Chairs into this response (and attached also my original message to you of 11<sup>th</sup> April). I have not written an additional reply to your comments and complaints, but would expect the opportunity to do this as part of any review by the Board.

Wilson and the co-chairs tampered seriously with the meeting minutes from Genève, and Wilson now used this fraud to claim that his special requirements for me still applied. Moreover, he claimed that I could not veto his communications to the people who had complained about me, which directly contradicted the Collaboration Agreement he had himself entered with me.

It waws horrible mismanagement that the co-chairs did not react to this. It was hardly a coincidence that, less than an hour later, Burton sent this to Wilson, Farquhar and me:

I write on behalf of Cindy and myself as Co-Chairs of Cochrane.

Over the last few years there have been a number of discussions involving Mark, Peter, the Co-Chairs, the Governing Board, members of the Senior Management Team and others in leadership positions in Cochrane. There has been (and continues to be) disagreement about what was said, what was meant, what was understood and what was agreed, on several occasions. As you both know, there is currently a disagreement relating to a number of formal complaints.

In the best interests of the Charity, the situation needs to be resolved and we need to learn from it.

There was a need to identify a process that is fair to both of you. We believe it should be one that allows fresh, independent eyes to look at the facts, identify differences of opinion, and make recommendations. As a result, we intend to proceed as outlined in the attached document. This document outlines the plan that we will adopt. At the heart of this is the fact that the review will not be undertaken by any of the Board members, but rather by an independent person who will provide a confidential report to the Board. We are sending it to you now to give you the opportunity to ask questions about it.

We felt it was important that you both had sight of this plan before anybody else, in order that you could raise any questions that you might have. We will be writing to the other Board members today simply to tell them that we have written to you with a plan, so that they are reassured that we are making progress. We would like to be able to write to them again, with a copy of the plan, next week. As a result, it would be helpful to receive any questions you may have as soon as possible.

Instead of resolving a trivial dispute, the co-chairs now made it a big issue. I felt that something really bad was about to happen to me. The only reason there were disagreements was that Wilson was a liar who constantly turned things upside down as he pleased and routinely violated the rules, he had himself constructed.

Wilson replied that he was happy with the plan. Of course he was. I did not doubt that he had been involved with drafting it. He was also confident that he would win.

Leaders with psychopathic traits always win, at least initially, because they violate the rules, which their opponents do not. Wilson was obsessive with writing huge documents about "rules," and Burton was obsessive with processes that had no substance. It was Kafkaesque.

Wilson tried to destroy me, but he ended up destroying Cochrane. Once, when I complained to Cochrane's founder, Iain Chalmers, about Wilson's constant witch-hunt after me, Iain replied: "He does not know whom he is up against."

I responded the same day with my initial comments: "I disagree with your plan. The whole Governing Board will need to deal with this, and it is my right to require this according to the Collaboration Agreement Mark and I have entered a year ago."

How naïve I was. I still thought that Wilson's agreements with Cochrane centres mattered.

On 23 April, David wrote to Joerg, Gerald and me that Burton and Wilson were trying to avoid a broader discussion of these issues in the board because they saw that they did not have a clear majority. He also noted that they wanted to avoid having a complaints committee of the board. Of course. The plot by Wilson and Burton would not have survived an impartial complaints committee's scrutiny of the issues.

On 26 April, I sent [my full reply](#) to the co-chairs' proposed plan and asked them not to send it to Wilson as I had needed to quote some of what had been said during governing board only time. However, I am convinced that they showed my letter to Wilson, which included the incident where he called me a liar. I also asked them to remove [the statement](#) about my 2015 Daily Mail article on Cochrane's website, as it was outdated and very damaging for our work at the Nordic Cochrane Centre.

It is usually very difficult to do searches on the Cochrane website, but by searching on *Statement from Cochrane*, this statement pops up as the only one, even in 2022. Is this really the only statement Cochrane ever made? Just for the fun of it, I also searched on "*Peter C Gøtzsche*," which gave no results. "*Peter C Gotzsche*" gave 9854 results. But when I searched on "*Mark Wilson*," I also got 9854 results. Searching on *bully* or *hallo* also gave 9854 results. There is a lot that doesn't work in Cochrane, including the button *More about searches*, which was totally dead.

In my reply to the co-chairs I included my suggestions for responding to the complaints. I also explained that it's a huge problem for due process that the same person, the CEO, is responsible for writing the policy; for investigating possible cases of violation of this policy without independent oversight; and for punishing people for alleged violations. No civilized society allows such an enormous concentration of power in one man but have separated these functions to prevent injustice. Wilson not only handled all three; he also made it clear at our board meeting in Genève a year earlier that he didn't even find it necessary to involve the person complained about before he came up with his verdict. Anyone should recognise that this is a breach in the rules of procedural fairness and natural justice.

I explained that it would be easy for the board to make a decision on the cases. However, I did not hear anything for the next six weeks.

On 27 April, I wrote to my three supporters that if the board could not tell Wilson to behave properly, the board should be disbanded. I noted that the key issue was the way Wilson interpreted the Spokesperson Policy, which must change, for the benefit of Cochrane. My enemies had discovered that Wilson was a willing executioner and was very happy to assist them in punishing me, so the complaints would continue to flow in. Considering the many diverse areas where I had been active, and that I, in my science, often arrived at conclusions that were unpopular among people with financial conflicts of interest in relation to the pharmaceutical industry, or who held strong opposing views, it was surprising that Cochrane had not received many more complaints.

I explained that the board should handle the dispute instead of using an external observer as suggested in the plan, because such an assessment would depend entirely on who that person was. The plan quoted Wilson for saying that I had failed to follow the Spokesperson Policy several times and had behaved incorrectly by involving the board in matters that should be dealt with by himself "before being escalated to the board." This was scary. The victim being alone with his ruler, judge and executioner, all in one person, with no witnesses, was what Wilson wanted.

The co-chairs wrote on 20 April that, "There was a need to identify a process that is fair to both of you," but Wilson was quoted for two statements critical of me while I was quoted for none about him, and, in contrast to him, I was not asked to contribute to the plan.

I wrote in my reply to the co-chairs' plan that it was astounding and highly one-sided that Wilson spoke about me behaving incorrectly while nothing was said about his own embarrassing behaviour on Friday, 23 March where he called me a liar, even though both co-chairs were fully aware of it, and it was discussed at length during the board only time the same day.

## 9 Preparations for the show trial

The board did not handle the trivial issues, which it should have done. On 7 June, the co-chairs explained that they had sought and received legal advice, which they forwarded. Gerrard Tyrrell from Harbottle & Lewis LLP wrote that they had completed their review of the material they had received. I had no idea what this material consisted of, but evidently Wilson had been involved with collecting it. Tyrrell used the term “Counsel,” which is an English lawyer - a barrister - who acts independently. In this case it was Thomas Grant.

Tyrrell wrote that repeated attempts had been made to address many of the matters raised but that there had been no resolution and that there were serious legal concerns for the trustees bearing in mind Cochrane's position as a charity.

This is how a law firm makes itself indispensable when there is no need to hire a law firm. There were no serious legal concerns, previous matters were settled, and the current issues were trivial. Tyrrell “strongly” recommended that Cochrane escalate the problem and pay the firm to conduct an independent review, with advice from Counsel, of “all of the various complaints” going back 15 years.

Counsel ended up [disagreeing with this](#) and found that even going just 3 years back would not be fair towards me. This illustrated that lawyers, like doctors, can disagree wildly. I mention this because Counsel's report was eventually used by the board as if everything in it was indisputable.

During the board's upcoming teleconference on 13 June, I would not be allowed to participate in the discussion about this agenda item, and it would not be included in the minutes that would be made publicly available.

The co-chairs did not explain why they had chosen to escalate a trivial dispute, but at the teleconference, a majority of the board agreed that a legal review should be undertaken. Hammerstein argued that, as it was not a legal issue, but a conflict, a conflict resolution approach was required, and there were concerns that it would be seen as Cochrane “getting lawyers involved against a centre director,” which was not good for Cochrane's reputation.

Burton noted that the expense wasn't a problem for the charity. It was absolutely clear that the aim of the whole exercise was to kick me out of Cochrane with the excuse that I had violated some rules. The co-chairs were not worried about the consequences for Cochrane; they were cocky that their PR machine would prevent a public scandal.

Burton tampered with the meeting minutes. Despite repeated requests, he denied me access to the minutes in relation to item 10, which was about the legal process. I then informed the board that, although Marguerite Koster was not allowed to participate for item 8, about her possible appointment as co-chair, she got the minutes with the identity of the voters and what they voted, which was also my interest in item 10. Some are more equal than others in Cochrane.

I still didn't get the minutes. Burton responded that they would be in the binder I would receive from Cochrane's law firm. When I came back after my holidays, on 30 July, the binder had arrived, but the minutes only mentioned that 8 voted yes and 4 no, with no names. I then asked Burton to send me the same email as he had sent to the rest of the board.

When Burton did not reply, I sent a third email explaining that I suspected that the minutes I had were not the same as those the rest of the board had received. I reminded Burton that I was entitled to get these minutes. Burton replied that he would “take advice on this.”

Five days later, he wrote, copying co-chair Farquhar and Cochrane's lawyer, Natasha Hibbert:

“We have been advised not to send you the information you request ... Please address any further enquiries about this (as well as any requests for further documents, or information, that may in any way relate to the Independent Review, or the matters it is considering) to the lawyers who are advising the Collaboration. I am copying this to Natasha Hibbert, one of our lawyers; she is the person with whom you should correspond.”

I wrote to Hibbert, copying the co-chairs: “Please do not use passive tense when dealing with legal matters, ‘We have been advised’ ... Who exactly are ‘we?’ ... Who exactly advised you? ... And why this advice?” I asked again whether my minutes were identical to those the rest of the board had received, and if not, who had changed them and with what argument.

Hibbert replied that, “we are instructed by the co-chairs of the Governing Board ... The final minute has not yet been approved ... We can confirm that the draft minute that was sent to you is identical to the copy that was circulated to the board, although the identities of the trustees who voted either way were anonymised following a request that was made.”

Thus, the minutes I received had been tampered with, and no one would have told me if I had not made enquiries, nor did they want to tell me who altered the minutes or why. This playing hide and seek is not how a legal process should be carried out and it violated Cochrane’s principles about transparency, openness, and accountability. “A request that was made.” By Burton? Wilson?

The draft minutes were circulated already on 18 June and revealed the voters’ identity. Thus, Burton lied when he told me I had the minutes.

It is a serious, and even a criminal offence to tamper with meeting minutes and to mislead a board member who suspects that this occurred. Burton also seemed to have tampered with other documents. In the binder I received, my centre’s letterhead at the top of the first page had been deleted in the 15-page letter I sent to the co-chairs on 26 April. Why? When the letterhead is gone, which is a deliberate action that requires at least ten strokes on the computer, one has to wonder whether other bits have been left out, too. Since the whole dispute was about whether I was entitled to use the letterhead of my centre, it is both ironic and offensive that someone – likely Burton - deleted this.

I wrote to Meerpohl that I realised I should have done things differently. I contemplated hiring a lawyer of my own to represent me. I could have let Wilson respond in the way he wanted to the silly complainants. I also considered stepping down as centre director and ask my deputy to do Cochrane-related work while I continued as head of department with my research. I was also willing to withdraw my board membership. I couldn’t see much meaning with it anyway, as Wilson controlled everything.

## **10 My reply to criticism in my 66-page report to Counsel**

I was initially given only 8 days to respond to 330 pages of documents. It was a monumental task, with no legal assistance, and in a period where I had no time to spare, as I was travelling and had planned to do research with a guest researcher from Sydney, Maryanne Demasi.

The deadline was extended by two weeks, and I submitted a report on 30 August of [66 pages plus 7 appendices](#). For full transparency, I have uploaded everything on my website, including [Burton’s documents for Counsel](#). In my response to Counsel, I explained why the allegations raised against me had no merit. The two most important issues I documented were:

1) Mismanagement of Cochrane, which included serious acts of tampering with evidence, in the form of manipulating the minutes of meetings and other evidence by the CEO, his staff, and the

co-chairs of the Governing Board. I highlighted how important meeting minutes are: “They are the quasi-legal record of proceedings and can be produced in court as evidence of decisions and resolutions made. Falsifying such a record, for whatever reason, is therefore comparable to committing perjury. Knowingly producing and then passing off minutes as accurate and true, when you know them to be demonstrably false, is not simply a matter of maladministration, but is [potentially a criminally fraudulent act](#).”<sup>31</sup>

2) The Spokesperson Policy is so ambiguous that it cannot be used to discipline Cochrane contributors or to tell them that they have violated it.

### **2003: Letter from Steering Group co-chair Jim Neilson**

The oldest complaint Burton had included in his binder to Counsel was from 2003. Steering Group co-chair Jim Neilson criticised that I had listed the Nordic Cochrane Centre as my professional address in three papers in the *BMJ* and *Lancet*. As this was the only address the first author and I had, and it was our place of work, this was entirely appropriate. Anything else would have been dishonest.

In our *BMJ* paper, 11 methodologists reported on the quality of 53 new Cochrane reviews.<sup>32</sup> Neilson noted that many in the Collaboration felt that it was misleading because it was out of date (which was not correct), embarrassing, and potentially damaging; further, one entity almost lost external financial support. However, in science, we hold people accountable for what they publish, and it is not relevant if the assessment is embarrassing for some people. We reported that the evidence did not fully support the conclusion in nine reviews (17%), and that all the problematic conclusions were too favourable for the experimental intervention.

We informed our Cochrane colleagues well ahead of publication, which was to our own disadvantage, as the Steering Group put pressure on us not to publish the results. I was summoned to a Steering Group meeting to explain why we wanted to publish. I said that since we belonged to an organisation that constantly assesses and critiques others’ research and points out when inconvenient results are being suppressed, it would be wrong to suppress our own results, which would also be an act of censorship. I also noted that it would demonstrate Cochrane’s strength that we were willing to criticise ourselves and explained that it was important for patients, doctors, and others to know that conclusions of Cochrane reviews should be viewed with caution, which means that they needed to read more than just the conclusion.

As it turned out, nothing untoward happened to Cochrane. In fact, our paper benefited Cochrane. It led to other quality improvement initiatives being undertaken. Further, *BMJ*’s editor gave the two co-chairs the opportunity to publish an editorial where they outlined what was currently ongoing in Cochrane, which also benefited Cochrane.<sup>33</sup>

We could not have foreseen that one entity’s funding would come into question. I am pretty sure which review group this was. It performed so badly that it might have benefited Cochrane if it had not survived. It is always difficult to know what the balance will be between benefits and harms of our interventions. I wrote to Neilson that the single most important factor that enabled

---

<sup>31</sup> Hadley R. Falsified minutes: a step too far? 2016; 28 Feb.

<sup>32</sup> Olsen O, Middleton P, Ezzo J, et al. Quality of Cochrane reviews: assessment of sample from 1998. *BMJ* 2001;323:829-32.

<sup>33</sup> Clarke M, Langhorne P. Revisiting the Cochrane Collaboration. Meeting the challenge of Archie Cochrane - and facing up to some new ones. *BMJ* 2001;323:821.

me in 2001 - after years of struggle - to ensure permanent funding for my centre, our software development, and for the three review groups based in Denmark, was our research.

After our paper, many Cochrane contributors published about shortcomings in Cochrane reviews without being reprimanded. I have often come in trouble only because I was first.

In two *Lancet* papers, we had questioned the rationale for screening for breast cancer with mammography. In 1999, we were asked by the Danish National Board of Health – a vitally important funder for us – to assess the mammography screening trials. The Board of Health did not like our results and tried to bury them,<sup>34</sup> so we published them as a systematic review in *Lancet* instead, in 2000.<sup>35</sup>

Because of our address, Neilson opined that our review gave the impression that it was a Cochrane review. This was silly. It was obvious that our paper was not a Cochrane review, and it was not published in the *Cochrane Library*. What happened was that some staunch screening advocates went ballistic about our results and complained about us to Cochrane without providing any scientific arguments to justify their objections. Some of these people were extremely belligerent and routinely [tortured their data till they confessed](#) or lied about them.

Next, the Board of Health funded us to do a Cochrane review of mammography screening. This seemed straightforward, but it became the [biggest scandal in Cochrane's history](#). The Cochrane Breast Cancer group refused to publish our data on the harms of screening, which included overdiagnosis and overtreatment, although these outcomes were listed in our review protocol the group had approved and published. We patiently negotiated with the group for a long while but got nowhere. After almost a year of repeated peer review, resubmissions, and negotiations, including a face-to-face meeting in London I had arranged, we were suddenly told, shortly before the publication date, that the group did not want to publish our data on overtreatment, although they appeared in the same randomised trials as those that reported the effect of screening on breast cancer mortality.

Earlier, *Lancet* had offered us to publish a research letter based on the Cochrane review, but we declined as there was too little space. However, as it was our duty towards the women and their relatives to publish the harms data, we contacted *Lancet* again. *Lancet* worked fast and ensured that we published our research letter,<sup>36</sup> with [the full review](#) that included the harms on *Lancet's* website, and the [Cochrane review](#) at the same time, in October 2001.

We did not take this decision lightly. We consulted with prominent figures in Cochrane who strongly recommended us to publish a full version in *Lancet*, and they felt that Cochrane would benefit from this experience. My centre's Advisory Board and Cochrane's founder, Iain Chalmers, also supported us. Chalmers said that Cochrane needed to grow up.

We were under immense pressure from the Cochrane Breast Cancer group, and also politically, both from people in- and outside Cochrane, including the Danish Board of Health that had funded our review, to arrive at politically palatable results.

---

<sup>34</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mammography screening: truth, lies and controversy](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Olsen O. Is screening for breast cancer with mammography justifiable? *Lancet* 2000;355:129-34.

<sup>36</sup> Olsen O, Gøtzsche PC. Cochrane review on screening for breast cancer with mammography. *Lancet* 2001;358:1340-2.

Our *Lancet* research letter was clearly not a Cochrane review, but I apologised to Neilson that we had called it, *Cochrane review on screening for breast cancer with mammography*, which was merely our announcement that the long-awaited Cochrane review was now available - like a journalist might have described it in a headline. Ironically, the full *Lancet* review was more of a Cochrane review than the stymied Cochrane review that lacked data on the most important harms of screening.

It took five years and repeated complaints to the Cochrane Publication Arbiter and the Steering Group before the Cochrane Breast Cancer group was finally forced to publish our harms data.

Like our *BMJ* paper, this story illustrated that what some people thought might be harmful to the reputation of Cochrane at first, can prove to be beneficial in the long run.

Neilson also mentioned that a [systematic review of immunoglobulins](#) for sepsis my research group was about to publish in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* had enraged Cochrane editor Paul Garner from the Infectious Diseases group and that we might have written it in collaboration with the authors of an [already published Cochrane review](#).

Yes, we could have. However, at the heart of science is independent replication, which we treasure. It is being loyal to the principles of Cochrane to highlight publicly when a Cochrane review is problematic.

I responded that if we had collaborated with the Cochrane authors, it would not have been an independent replication. Further, it is close to impossible to make researchers change their mind once they have already decided which methods to use and have published their results.

We had informed Garner two years before we published our systematic review that we were working on it. A year later, Mike Clarke, UK Cochrane Centre Director and co-chair of the Steering Group, wrote to Garner and Neilson that our upcoming review was part of the first author's PhD and that I had needed to protect her chances of getting it published as a new piece of work, and not as part of an existing Cochrane review. The Cochrane authors would see our paper when it was accepted so that they could update their review if necessary, and we would also share the background material we had gathered. Clarke explained that our paper was not "hostile to the Cochrane review" but discussed the findings of a subgroup analysis in the Cochrane review and contrasted them with our own findings. Finally, Clarke wrote that we had inserted a disclaimer: "The views expressed in this article represent those of the authors and are not necessarily the views of other members of the Cochrane Collaboration."

We did the review because it was highly controversial at my hospital – which hosted our centre - whether immunoglobulins save lives, and these drugs were the second-largest drug expenditure. I was a member of the hospital's drug committee and offered to do an independent review because the Cochrane authors had not paid sufficient attention to the biases in the trials. Moreover, their search strategy was narrow, and they had not retrieved much information from the trialists. Our result was very important. In contrast to the Cochrane review, we found no reliable evidence that immunoglobulins saved lives, and this treatment is no longer used.

The [most recent version](#) of the Cochrane review from 2013 confirms our results from 2004. In their original review, the authors had not separated trials with a low risk of bias from those with a high risk, which they should have done, as this was the standard.

Later, research carried out at my hospital and elsewhere confirmed our findings. We provided an immense service to the whole world by performing our review, which was more important than avoiding temporarily upsetting a Cochrane editor. However, Cochrane was clubbish, was called a

“family” like in mafia circles, and in the secret show trial against me I was seriously reprimanded for having criticised some of my Cochrane colleagues for substandard research.

I informed Neilson back then that, at the centre directors’ meeting in Melbourne in 2003, we had agreed that people who are full-time employees at a Cochrane centre should use this address, since readers might think that the authors try to hide something if they were not honest about their affiliation.

It is not surprising that people can become upset when you demonstrate that their research has serious limitations. This was the case in all of Neilson’s complaints. And that is not my fault.

Interestingly, when I ran for a post on the Governing Board in December 2016, Neilson and Garner were very positive towards what I stood for (see Chapter 5).

### **2017: When the emperor embarrassed himself in front of his entourage**

The way Burton described these events in the 330 pages he sent to Cochrane’s law firm on 2 July 2018 was deeply dishonest, and it is an aggravating factor that Burton knew what had happened.

Burton wrote that Meerpohl had witnessed “the strong words and disagreement,” which downplayed Wilson’s physical aggression. Burton did not explain that the “strong words” and intimidating body language was only expressed by Wilson. I remained very calm during the encounter and suggested we reached an amicable agreement. Burton’s deliberate misrepresentation of the facts was grave, particularly considering that this was the material on which the law firm hired by Cochrane was meant to form an objective and fair assessment.

Burton wrote that he immediately tried to stop all discussions during the board only time about “these matters” and that this was supported by trustees “with significant and relevant governance experience,” as if this inappropriate reference to authority – which is alien to Cochrane thinking – would somehow justify Burton’s intervention.

Yet again, Burton’s account was mendacious. Virtually all board members were interested in discussing Wilson’s bullying behaviour and they were shocked that Cochrane’s CEO acted like this towards two elected board members. We therefore spent quite some time discussing it.

Burton wrote that “it was difficult to stop Peter Gøtzsche speaking,” which was also misleading. I had questioned his argument that we should not discuss Wilson’s bullying behaviour because – it was claimed – that it might jeopardize the board’s judgment about spokesperson issues. I was not the only board member with the view that these were totally separate issues. Furthermore, Burton was inconsistent. In his plan, he allowed Wilson to connect the two when Wilson referred to my behaviour. Some are more equal than others in Cochrane.

Burton lied when he mentioned “a serious allegation concerning the behaviour of Mark Wilson as CEO” when Wilson totally lost his temper and became physically aggressive. Something that four board members actually witnessed is not an allegation, it is a fact.

### **Burton lied blatantly in his report to Counsel about decisions in Genève in 2017**

Burton lied blatantly about Wilson’s special provisions for me. He wrote that I had stated I was released from these obligations following a discussion in the board only time in Genève. “Neither Professor Farquhar or I believe that that is true. Indeed, most (perhaps all) trustees would not have been aware of the letter or agreement so it is hard to see how they could agree to his being released from any such obligations.”

I made all trustees aware of these agreements at our meeting. Therefore, as it was only 16 months ago we had the meeting, there are only two possibilities: Either Burton and Farquhar had an extremely poor memory, or they were lying. As Burton does not have a poor memory, he was lying. In any case, it could be argued that they should both have resigned from the board. It is too risky for a charity to be led by people with such poor memories or who are tampering with the evidence and are responsible for meeting minutes.

When I spoke with Meerpohl about it, he clearly remembered that during the board only time in Genève – when I was outside the door – the board discussed Wilson’s special provisions. The board did not accept that any special provisions were in force for me. Meerpohl said he was willing to testify that this was the case.

Lisa Bero, then co-chair, pushed hard for making the board accept the provisions but failed. The day before, she had taken me aside and told me that the board would very likely forbid me to use my own letterhead. In the same way, she took my deputy aside and told him the same thing. We both felt it was a *fait accompli*, which she and Wilson had planned beforehand.

When I was out the door, it was noted that the reason we have a Spokesperson Policy is to avoid conflicts about what Cochrane contributors can and cannot say, and therefore there is no need for special provisions. This is one of the reasons it was decided that, as long as I adhered to the Spokesperson Policy, there would be no problem. Everyone had hoped that this would resolve the issues between Wilson and me.

I find it extremely serious that the two co-chairs denied in a summary to a law firm what was so clearly said and agreed upon at a meeting only 16 months earlier.

Bero had tried to prevent me from defending myself. When we came to the item, “the co-chairs’ correspondence,” she asked me to leave the room immediately because I was conflicted. I refused and said she needed to say what it was about and that I should be allowed to defend myself. Bero’s conduct was inappropriate. A person accused of wrongdoing must be told what the charge is and be allowed to defend himself before being asked to leave. Both before and after this happened, Bero was aggressive towards me and directly rude, too. A board member told me that she lost her authority given the way she behaved and that it was clear to rest of the board that she had a personal grudge against me. I never understood why but it might be jealousy. I had emerged as a high profile critic of the drug industry and conflicts of interest, which had traditionally been her domain.

Bero had to accept my request, and I was out the door for only ten minutes. I was told that I was free to use my letterhead in correspondences, without restrictions – I could also use it for non-Cochrane issues. I distinctly remember Clarkson kindly saying that there was no problem if I abided by the Spokesperson Policy. Later the same day, Meerpohl and Gartlehner told me that it was virtually unanimously agreed and never really in doubt that I could use my letterhead for non-Cochrane purposes. The reality was that other centre directors often did this, but none of them drew the ire of Wilson.

In [my report to Counsel](#), I described that what happened in Genève was a clear case of serious tampering with the evidence and serious mismanagement of a charity, committed by our triumvirate: the CEO and the two co-chairs.

Counsel “unequivocally” [rejected](#) my evidence-based conclusion “because it is a very serious allegation.” This is a non-sequitur a lawyer should not make. He furthermore argued that, “How one goes about drafting minutes can be a difficult task. It involves synthesising what is often a fluid, many-voiced meeting,” and that Wilson and Binder undertook that task in a bona fide way,

which means without intention to deceive. This is an equally empty postulate. Counsel cannot know what goes on in Wilson's head.

Counsel's curious way of reasoning continued: "The idea that there was tampering is wholly inconsistent with the minutes having been sent in the first instance to the co-chairs for their provisional approval. Were the minutes 'seriously misleading' then the co-chairs would have immediately rejected them." I wonder if he reasons similarly in a court case. Counsel ignored that the co-chairs knew the minutes were untruthful and it got worse:

"If the minutes were 'seriously misleading' or even 'misleading' then plainly the board would not have voted (by majority) to approve them, unless it be said that that majority were colluding in a large conspiracy to 'tamper' with minutes."

Being a lawyer, surely Counsel must know what group pressure can do to people – it is called "coercion," and it is utter nonsense to claim that this assumes a conspiracy. Counsel used one of Schopenhauer's tricks: "Choose metaphors favourable to your position."

Counsel did not consider the obvious explanation for the tampering: That the CEO and the co-chairs were antagonistic to me, which was actually the case. I threatened Wilson's supreme rule. This affair demonstrated that Counsel was not impartial, not to mention that his briefing documents were cherry picked by Burton, with lies interjected here and there, casting me in an unfavourable light.

## 11 Wilson's reply to Counsel

I received Wilson's undated submission to Counsel on 23 August 2018. It was [amazingly untruthful](#) and Wilson also questioned my motives.

When I became elected for the Governing Board, I wrote to Lucie Binder in Wilson's office and explained that, in order to prepare for my new assignment, I needed the election statements for the current members of the board, the application and CV for Wilson, and any assessments of his performance that the board had seen.

In Wilson's mind, my reasonable request was translated into: "Where does this deep animus by Peter towards me come from?" He also wrote: "Peter's main focus of resentment has always been me." This is known as the *pity me* trick, which is a psychopathic trait. Psychopaths are brutal towards others but still expect us to pity them over minor or non-existing issues.

It is astounding that Wilson, in bold letters, declared that, "the pattern of aggressive language, bullying approaches and offending others inside and outside Cochrane belongs to Peter, not to me," when the evidence of this behaviour so clearly pointed towards himself. This is what psychologists call [projection](#). It refers to unconsciously taking unwanted emotions or traits you don't like about yourself and attributing them to someone else.

Wilson's assertion that, "he only hears, records and reports what he wants to," was also an accurate description of himself, not me, who only tried to survive in the surreal Cochrane universe Wilson had created where everything revolved around himself.

Wilson postulated that there was a longstanding and well-known pattern of aggressive communication, sometimes qualifying as bullying of Cochrane collaborators and other external stakeholders by me over many years. This was mendacious. Wilson gave two examples, both of which are highly misleading.

One was a letter from people who had published an article where they claimed – using highly flawed methods – that mammography screening reduces breast cancer mortality by 38-48%. I

documented in detail [in the BMJ](#) what was wrong with their methods. My deputy and I also posted a comment on our website where we concluded that the paper presented “wishful thinking and inappropriate extrapolations far beyond the data ... What is perhaps even more important is that they must have cherry-picked the data they liked.”

The truth in Wilson’s other example is the exact opposite of what he claimed. I didn’t bully anyone but just defended myself against the staff member, Julie Wood, he had ordered to bully me (see page 20).

The problem for Wilson was that I did not cave in to his unjustified threats. He must have known that my expulsion would be immensely harmful to Cochrane, which raises interesting questions: Why didn’t he care? What were his motives? Did he have hidden interests?

Of course, the Cochrane leadership had hoped to be able to tell the press, avoiding any questions, that, “An independent, legal investigation has shown that Peter Gøtzsche has broken our rules, but we cannot give any details, as we want to protect his right to confidentiality and privacy ...” However, this was not what Counsel found, and as [I uploaded his report](#) for everyone to see, Wilson could not spin the story and pretend that he had saved Cochrane by sacking me. No one would have believed him.

## 12 The show trial



“This is like capital punishment what we’re doing”

*Gerald Gartlehner, former Cochrane Collaboration Governing Board member who resigned in protest*

“Industry will be elated. Oh finally, we are offering Peter’s head on a platter ... It’s the nuclear option”

*David Hammerstein, former board member who resigned in protest*

Child and adolescent psychiatrist Sami Timimi reviewed my book,<sup>37</sup> and here is an excerpt:

This book chronicles how an upside-down world is created when marketing triumphs over science; where the actual target of a years-long campaign of harassment gets labelled the guilty party ... Gøtzsche’s compelling account includes quotes and documentation from written and oral sources, including transcripts of what was actually said in various meetings.

The book stands as a detailed study in how organisations become corrupted unless they have carefully formulated processes that guard against anti-democratic forces taking control,

<sup>37</sup> Timimi S. [“Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane’s moral collapse”](#). Psychosis 2019; Oct 30.

once that organisation has been successful and reached a certain size. This is a book exposing how Cochrane fell into the clutches of a hierarchy more concerned with finances and marketing than the reasons it was created for. The death of its integrity, means that the most important institution left that could be trusted when it came to medical science, has disappeared down the same marketisation rabbit hole that captures so much of modern (so-called) medical science. Indeed it was because Professor Gøtzsche was prepared to call out the lowering of scientific standards in Cochrane that the hierarchy felt compelled to plot his demise.

Gøtzsche ... created many of the methodological tools used by Cochrane reviews and has never shied away from letting the data speak for itself, however unpopular the findings might be with some doctors, researchers, and in particular with pharmaceutical and other medical device manufacturers. Cochrane under the influence of Gøtzsche, and others like him, became known as a source of credible, reliable, and independent reviews ... helping doctors understand what worked and to what degree, but just as importantly what didn't work and what harms treatments may cause. It is these latter issues that meant that Gøtzsche was, and is, an inspiration to those of us who want medical practice to be as objective, free from bias, and safe as possible; but a threat to those who put commercial matters, marketisation, and image as their primary concern.

Gøtzsche's brilliance and his fearless approach earned him many enemies. He is one of Denmark's best-known researchers and is respected in research circles all over the world. But, for years he has documented how many products promoted by pharmaceutical industry and medical device manufacturers, can cause more harms than benefits; with detailed analysis of how the research from these companies misleads, obfuscates, or sometimes straightforwardly lies in order to protect and promote their products ... His work on psychiatric drugs showing how poor they all are at delivering better lives for those who take them, at the same time as causing enormous harms to millions, has earned him the ire of the psychiatric establishment at large, including some Cochrane groups ... Instead of congratulating Gøtzsche for ensuring the integrity of the science produced by Cochrane, they began a challenge to this truth seeker for being "off message."

This book carefully recounts this dark period in medical science where a once trusted institution carried out one of the worst show trials ever conducted in academia. The CEO and his collaborators went about their task in a manner that mirrors how the drug industry operates. Its employees are obliged to protect the sales of drugs and therefore cannot criticise the company's research publicly. There are many examples in the book of how once you label someone, their actions can be interpreted as fulfilling that label. For example, after being kept waiting for hours outside a room where a meeting about his potential expulsion is being discussed, an understandably frustrated Professor Gøtzsche, decides to knock on the door and go in to ask if it is OK if he goes back to the hotel rather than carry on waiting. He is reprimanded for entering the meeting and a brief altercation ensues, before Professor Gøtzsche leaves. This then becomes the only actual example of his alleged "bad behaviour" and part of the "evidence" for why he should be dismissed.

After his expulsion from Cochrane, through a majority vote of board members of only 6 against 5, with one abstention, a further four members of the board walked out in protest. Leading medical scientists from all over the world expressed their solidarity with Gøtzsche and outrage at what Cochrane had done. They universally praised Gøtzsche as a tireless advocate for research excellence, a fearless critic of scientific misconduct, and a powerful opponent of

the corruption of research by industry interests, and criticised the unsupportable actions of Cochrane. History will recount this as the death of Cochrane rather than the whistleblower.

Timimi was right that this was the beginning to the end of Cochrane. On 13 September 2021, the 3-year anniversary of my expulsion, I uploaded [a transcript](#) of the whole 6-hour secret board meeting, with my comments (I got the recordings from one of the board members), and [published an article](#) about the show trial and Cochrane's impending demise. Maryanne Demasi published a very interesting article the same day, [The Cochrane tapes](#).

The co-chairs and several other board members trampled on the core values in Cochrane, which were openness, transparency, and accountability. The co-chairs steered the meeting in a dominant way where they lied brutally and incessantly to convince the board to expel me. This included fabricating insinuations that I should have harassed Cochrane staff sexually and bullied Cochrane's CEO and his staff when the truth was that I was the victim of many years of bullying.

As the co-chairs did not have any good reasons for expelling me, they shrouded everything in secrecy by referring to confidentiality and privacy, both before and after the board meeting. In this way, they tried to avoid being held accountable for their actions. As an example, [Counsel's report](#) was marked, "STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL TO THE GOVERNING BOARD AND MR MARK WILSON. NOT TO BE DISSEMINATED ANY WIDER." The board was even told by the co-chairs that they needed to ask their lawyers whether or not the confidentiality extended to the fact that the review was undertaken and to the existence of the report. This was not up to the lawyers to decide, and it would violate core Cochrane values.

As Counsel's report contradicted the board's announcements of my culpability, I had no doubt that I must make it publicly available. As I needed to defend myself also against the numerous lies and defamatory rumours the co-chairs set in motion, also after my expulsion, I described the events and uploaded all important documents on [my website](#), including those that surfaced later. This allows people to form their own opinions.

During the "process" against me, the board broke every one of the most essential rules for charities and for Cochrane. [According to the Charity Commission](#), when you make a decision, you must:

- ensure you are sufficiently informed, taking any advice you need
- take into account all relevant factors
- ignore any irrelevant factors.

The board was not sufficiently informed. It did not take into account all relevant factors, not only because the information it received was incomplete - and some was misleading, biased and untruthful - but also because the co-chairs stopped all discussions when board members tried to bring relevant factors to the table that would have exonerated me.

The board did not have sufficient time to study the issues because the lengthy reports sent to them by Counsel arrived shortly before the board meeting on 13 September 2018 that resulted in my expulsion: 12 hours before for Counsel's report, and 1.5 days before for other documents. The documents, which the board needed to carefully consider, amounted to 652 pages, which corresponds to three books.

The discussions during the board meeting revealed beyond any doubt that the board members had not read all these pages. Moreover, the co-chairs did not ignore irrelevant factors but blew them up, lied about them, and used them actively to arrive at a decision to expel me.

According to the Code of Conduct for Trustees, the charity is effective, open, and accountable; with highest standards of integrity and stewardship; and the trustees must avoid actual impropriety and any appearance of improper behaviour.

According to Cochrane's [Charter of Good Management Practice](#), the management of Cochrane is based on:

- honesty, integrity, and trust
- high standards of professional conduct and competence
- commitment to transparency, openness, and accountability in relationships, communication, and actions
- a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation
- embracing the diversity of thought and perspective represented by all at Cochrane
- using power and authority in a fair and equitable manner
- showing respect for the views and actions of others
- ensuring every individual is treated fairly
- valuing the contribution colleagues make and recognising their achievements
- communicating in an honest, open, and truthful way
- avoiding focusing on irrelevant issues or incidents that took place long before the matters in hand.

The violation of *all* these rules was extraordinary, both in quantity, degree, and consistency. The basic requirement for honesty was violated so often that I wrote "This is not true" 24 times in my unedited comments on the transcript.

As I wanted to have witnesses to the injustice I expected, I brought three people. One was Maryanne Demasi, my visiting researcher from Sydney. Another was Anahi Testa Pedersen, a documentary filmmaker who made the film [Diagnosing Psychiatry](#) about my reform work in psychiatry, which had world premiere a month later, on 22 October 2018 in Copenhagen. She also worked for me from time to time. The third person, who did not reveal his identity to the board, was Janus Bang, a freelance documentary filmmaker and historian who had followed me since 2015.

We arrived early, and when the two co-chairs, Martin Burton and Marguerite Koster, entered the room, they immediately panicked. Burton marched towards our group and said he recognised Pedersen as a filmmaker. She explained that she would not be filming on this occasion. More than a year earlier, she had contacted Cochrane headquarters for interviews, but the staff was not forthcoming. They were very suspicious and might have found a photo of her on the Internet.

Burton demanded that my three staff should leave. I explained that, according to charity rules, a board member is allowed to bring members of staff to board meetings.

A good deal of back and forth arguments followed, and Burton left the room several times. Among his various arguments were that they had consulted their lawyers; that it was a private meeting; that I did not have the right to invite anyone to the meeting; and that the meeting would go ahead without me if I did not abide by this decision.

I repeated that they were violating the Charity Commission rules and that because it was a board meeting, not a private meeting, I was allowed to be accompanied by staff. I felt uncomfortable because I had observed several times during my 20 months on the Governing Board that Burton had either bent the rules or seemed to invent them on the spot, to his and his line manager, Wilson's benefit. I think this also happened on this occasion.

Burton repeated that it was a private meeting of the trustees where they would discuss confidential matters. The situation had become hectic and confused, to say the least.

Burton went into another room with most or all the other board members, except me, to explain to them what information he had received from Cochrane's lawyers. This was inappropriate. As I was a board member, Burton should not have excluded me from the discussion. Obviously, I was not conflicted when the matter was whether charity rules were or weren't broken.

Demasi asked Koster to allow her to support me, with the English language and psychologically, because these months had been very stressful for me. Koster was very defensive and arrogant and said: "We are all stressed, so should we all take support people to the meeting?" She furthermore argued that my written English was "perfect," although I have great trouble with legal English. Burton told Koster that there was no need to explain to Demasi why she was not allowed to be in the room with me and he asked Koster to stop speaking.

It must have been difficult for the board because it took 20 minutes before they came back from the other room. Koster asked my three colleagues to leave. I explained that our meeting was called a "Governing Board meeting, closed session, trustees only," and that I had not found the word "private" in any of the emails I had received. I again made the board aware that they broke the charity rules.

Koster interrupted me and argued again that it was a closed meeting. I replied that this only meant that Cochrane's CEO Mark Wilson and his staff were not allowed to participate and that it had nothing to do with whether the charity rules applied or not.

Koster interrupted me again and said they had consulted with the legal Counsel and that he had agreed that my three colleagues should leave. When I tried to dispute this, Koster interrupted me and said she could call Counsel. I did not accept that Counsel could trump charity rules, but Koster interrupted me again and said they could work that out later, which she never did.

Koster used this tactic repeatedly, and the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer has described it: "If you observe that your opponent has taken up a line of argument which will end in your defeat, you must not allow him to carry it to its conclusion, but interrupt the course of the dispute in time, or break it off altogether."<sup>38</sup>

Koster was very hostile and aggressive towards my guests, and Pedersen and Bang left the room to ease the tense situation. They found Burton in the corridor talking frantically with his lawyer: "I need to get rid of this man; how can I do it?"

Next, I asked whether the meeting was being recorded and reminded the board that we had agreed earlier (after the catastrophic tampering with the minutes after the Genève meeting 17 months earlier, which I did not mention) that all board meetings would be recorded to avoid disagreements about what was said and agreed. Koster said that, as the board meeting had not yet started, she did not want to engage in any such discussion.

---

<sup>38</sup> Schopenhauer A. The art of always being right. London: Gibson Square; 2009.

I insisted, despite her repeated rejections, but Koster continued to ignore my request. Tensions were running high, and Koster continued being very rude to Demasi and asked her to leave, which she did. No witnesses were allowed to the horrific show trial that was about to begin.

Koster tried to start the board meeting with some formalities, but Meerpohl mentioned my request and suggested that the meeting be recorded, also because we had agreed on this earlier. Koster interrupted him at least three times and said we should move on.

However, it was now so embarrassing that not even the steely co-chairs could ignore the requests. A long pause followed while the recording possibilities were being investigated, in another room where I was not allowed in. Twenty minutes later, Burton announced that people with Mac computers could record the meeting with Quick Time Player.

The carefully staged show trial was intended to be kept secret. Already the next day, Lucie Binder from Wilson's office sent an email to those four board members who had just resigned in protest over my expulsion: "Martin has asked that if any of you recorded the meeting yesterday, you give me the recording when you next meet and delete it from your computers. I have a USB stick if you need it."

There are no official recordings for the first hour of the meeting, which was a chaotic prelude to the six-hour meeting. However, I had a recorder in my jacket, which I left inside the room when I was asked to leave.

It was absolutely essential in terms of justice and accountability – including allowing people to get the opportunity to challenge the board's decision in such an important matter - to record the meeting. Since Koster flatly rejected this, it was clear that the co-chairs must have planned for a secret process, without any accountability, and with a predefined outcome, like during the Inquisition. No traces of the injustice were to be left behind.

The board meeting started 53 minutes after we had arrived. It was totally unprofessional, with a lot of I think, I feel, I assume, I don't know, but ... It was a farce and the antithesis of a court trial, with virtually no discussion of the evidence and dismissal of evidence in my favour.

The board, particularly Burton, were obsessed with my so-called behaviour and used the words "behave" or "behaviour" 127 times.

Burton stated numerous times that I did not agree with him, which he used to disqualify me, even though it was clear from Counsel's report that Burton lied about the facts.

The two co-chairs interrupted the other speakers excessively, particularly when they:

- said anything positive about me
- were about to prove that an allegation raised against me was false
- were about to prove that an allegation had been rejected, e.g. by Counsel
- were about to prove that others had done similar things as me without being punished
- questioned the actions of the co-chairs or Cochrane's CEO, Mark Wilson.

Including the introductory hour, Burton interrupted other board members at least 66 times, or every six minutes, and Koster at least 27 times.

I was given five minutes to defend myself. Thanks to Hammerstein, this became 12 minutes. Koster started out by asking me about Counsel's report:

"Peter will have to recuse himself from the discussion after this, is that Peter, do you accept the contents of the report?"

"That's a very unspecific question. What do you mean?"

“Have you read the report, and do you accept the conclusions of Counsel. I’m just looking for a yes and no answer.”

“Oh, but there are many conclusions, so I can’t say yes or no.”

“But do you accept the report, as is?”

“No, because I think from the report, it’s pretty weird, and perhaps that would need to be debated, perhaps we could comment on the report later. For example, I find it strange that the lawyer, being a lawyer, refers to ‘authority’ and ‘eminence,’ for example by saying that Martin is an ‘eminent professor’ and therefore cannot have done anything wrong.”

“But Peter, without getting into the specifics again, since you don’t accept the contents of the report at this point, I’d like to give you five minutes just to make a statement to the board before we ask you to recuse yourself.”

When I told Demasi after my short presence at the board what had happened, and that it had not made sense to me to say yes or no to a 39-page report, she immediately concluded that they had set up a trap for me. During the secret part of the board meeting, Burton said:

“The lawyers did point to us, it was their suggestion, that we ask Peter if he accepted the contents of the report because in the report at 104, the Counsel report, it is clearly articulated in what Counsel have, it’s believed that Peter should behave and why he has not behaved ... Can he accept the clear instruction that he cannot do certain things? Well, no he can’t! He doesn’t even understand section 104 of the report, because he doesn’t even understand what he is or isn’t allowed to do under the Collaboration Agreement, even though that is an agreement that he has broken ... There’s no doubt and we’ve had this discussion last night with Gerrard [Cochrane’s hired lawyer for the show trial] ... there’s no doubt about the behaviour, Gerrard has read all of the documents, there is no doubt that they believe this is ... they, they will defend us to the hilt.”

Section 104 was about a Collaboration Agreement I had entered with Wilson, and Counsel falsely believed I had breached it. Therefore, the trap was that, if I had accepted the report, they would have found me guilty, and if I had rejected it, they would also have found me guilty, being a hopeless case beyond reach because I did not accept the “evidence” and did not even understand what the Collaboration Agreement meant. This is the recipe for a witch trial. I understood better than Burton what this agreement meant, and Counsel misunderstood it. And Wilson? I as have described above, he just violated it!

The board members did not question Counsel’s judgments in relation to my actions, although everyone knows that lawyers disagree markedly with each other and make mistakes. Clarkson praised Counsel:

“What Counsel has done, with incredible professionalism, I envy the guy who has written this document, in terms of how he has been able to express himself, it’s beautiful. And I think it does tell us what the issue is ... there comes a point where you’ve got to decide what is damaging or what behaviours are damaging ... We’ve got a love-hate relationship with Peter. He can be absolutely wonderful, challenging, charismatic, innovative, incredibly intelligent but what the hell is he doing in this precise moment in time?”

The trap was really smart. And as it was set up by Cochrane’s hired lawyers, this documented that Counsel’s report was not “very objective and impartial,” as Koster claimed it was.

When Hammerstein in the afternoon lamented that I was not given time to express myself in the morning and suggested that I should get a chance to answer questions the board might have without being interrupted, Burton replied:

“He’s had ample opportunity and has provided ample documentation and declined a chance of speaking to Counsel.”

This was not the whole truth. I declined to be interviewed because I would not have legal assistance. Instead, I offered to reply to any written questions Counsel might have. I did not receive any questions. Burton misled the board members at the meeting by insinuating that I had refused to take part in the process.

During my short presence at the board meeting, I rejected the two main allegations that had been raised against me. I said that Counsel agreed with me that I had not broken the Spokesperson Policy and that it was not wrong of me to contact the board when Wilson threatened to close my centre if I didn’t please him. I therefore found that the “process” could have been avoided, including the expenses to the law firm.

I noted that I suspected that Wilson was behind all of it; that there was a hidden agenda; and that I had good reasons to believe that Wilson wanted to get rid of me, my centre, and my seat on the board.

I asked for permission to stay in the room because we were at a crossroads for Cochrane:

“Many people in Cochrane trust me that I can do something for them because they are deeply unsatisfied by the way Cochrane is going under Mark Wilson’s leadership, so this is about much bigger issues than the petty things about the Spokesperson Policy ... It’s not about me because it’s so clear I did nothing wrong from the lawyer’s report, so I actually encourage you to allow me to be in here so I can contribute to what I was elected for doing, namely doing something good for Cochrane and that means changing direction from the business-like perspective back to the science perspective, which is our whole reason for being here.”

Koster did not reply but asked me to leave the room. It was now exactly five minutes after I had started talking.

I said that I had some important questions that I believed I was entitled to get a reply to before I left, but Koster interrupted me again and asked me to leave, “given that we’ve wasted a fair bit of time already.” However, some are more equal than others in Cochrane. After I had left, more than an hour later, when a board member expressed concern about running out of time, Koster said, laughing: “Oh, we’ve got plenty of time, as much as you want.”

Hammerstein: “Given this is a long process with hundreds of pages and everything, and given that Peter has not been able to speak more than 30 seconds without being interrupted, wouldn’t you at least allow him to ask a few questions? This is such an important thing, I don’t think it’s too much to allow him, and I would ask you to, please, as chair, not to interrupt him and let him speak for at least five minutes without being interrupted with the questions he wants to ask, before he leaves the room, I don’t understand what the problem is?”

Faba: “I think we need to hear Peter’s questions ...”

Koster interrupts: “So, Peter, well, very briefly because we have to make up for some of the time that we’ve lost already.”

“OK, so I have used months on this and then you ask me to use just five minutes here. Thank you a lot, that’s very kind of you (I tried to ease the extreme tension a little by joking, but it didn’t go down well). You must understand, Cochrane is in deep trouble and the world is watching what you’re up to. Not least against me but against people in similar situations. Cochrane is in crisis. And you have no idea about this. Editors from the *BMJ* and elsewhere, they’re watching what happens in Cochrane right now. So, it’s not prudent of you to treat me this way. I’m just the messenger. You haven’t realized that. OK? I’m surprised that when 400 pages [my estimate based

on the hight of the stack] were sent to the lawyer, these were compiled by Martin Burton, and he did not involve me at all ...”

Koster interrupts: “OK, this is ...”

“Did you involve Mark Wilson in compiling all these papers Martin?”

Koster interrupts again: “Peter, this ...”

“That’s a relevant question ...”

“Peter, this is all in the documents.”

“No, it’s not here whether Martin Burton involved Mark Wilson in compiling the 400 pages, that’s not stated anywhere. I am asking, did you or did you not?”

Burton nods.

“You did. OK, that’s for the minutes.”

Burton fired back: “I’ve said nothing. And I intend to say nothing. I wish as the chair to record my objection to this, the line we’re taking here. I don’t agree, after all the effort that has gone into all these pages that Peter, the lawyers advised that we should ask him the questions we’ve asked him, give him 5 minutes and it is now 10 or 15 minutes and I think this is an abuse of process. Sorry.”

It is remarkable that Burton talked about an abuse of process when I asked a highly relevant question about how the documentation was compiled, which Burton refused to reply to. *This* was an abuse of process.

“Why don’t you want to answer such a simple question which is important for whether this process has been fair and equitable?”

Koster: “Peter, I think I’m going to have to ask you to recuse yourself.”

“This is looking more and more like a Kafkaesque process; don’t you realize that? And now you’ve involved lawyers, so this is a semi-legal process, and yet you forbid me, against charity rules, to bring my scientist who is very good at advising people. She has advised the Minister in Australia ...”

Koster interrupts: “Peter, this is not a legal process, this is not a trial.”

“It’s a semi-legal process. Yes, it definitely is. And I also want to know, my report that I sent to the lawyers on the 30th of August, when was that seen by the co-chairs? Was it seen before everybody else saw it yesterday, or when it was, did you receive it immediately when I submitted it to the lawyers?”

Koster interrupts: “Peter I don’t even want to get into a discussion about this. We are definitely going to have to ask you to leave at this point.”

“This is relevant because remarkably similar letters came from senior figures, came to me from the board, a few days after I delivered my report to the law firm, so my suspicion is that there is a connection there, that this is actually some kind of show trial I’ve been exposed to ...”

“Peter that may be your suspicion, but it is not the truth, I’m going to have to ask you to leave at this point because we’re getting into issues that are irrelevant to this conversation.”

“Of course, you think it’s irrelevant ...”

Koster interrupts: “If you would please excuse yourself now, I would appreciate it. We need to move on with this discussion.”

My highly relevant question about when the co-chairs saw the report, I submitted to Counsel on 30 August was dismissed as being irrelevant. After I was forced to leave the room, Koster admitted that she saw my report before the rest of the board did, and Burton revealed that Cindy

Farquhar, who wrote a letter of complaint on 3 September, also knew about it because she was the outgoing co-chair that Koster replaced.

This strengthened my suspicion that Burton orchestrated the letters of complaints as soon as he had seen my report. These letters arrived to him between 2 and 5 September, and they all called for my expulsion from the board because I had criticised the Cochrane review on the HPV vaccines, published in May 2018. I shall describe this in detail below (see page 86).

In the last few minutes I was in the boardroom, I asked: “But what are you going to discuss in relation to me because the lawyer actually exonerates me?”

Koster: “Peter that’s your impression of it. We are going to be discussing the report as it was sent to us and the conclusions, and we were advised by Counsel that you must recuse yourself from this discussion.”

Before I left, I said, “One last thing, the lawyer suggests that we should not use our letterheads if we correspond about non-Cochrane matters. That would kill the Cochrane Collaboration, at least the Cochrane centres. We apply for funding for other projects which help us survive and if we don’t use our Cochrane affiliation and letterhead, people would laugh at us, so it’s harmful for Cochrane. A lot of what the lawyer suggests is harmful for Cochrane. And I am not allowed to say anything about this, so I hope the rest of you will when you throw me out of the room ...”

Koster interrupts: “Peter, when you have an opportunity to discuss these issues ...”

“When will I be allowed in again?”

“You will have an opportunity to address this report in writing, if you choose to do so.”

“I will.”

“That definitely is your right, and that information can then be shared with the board.”

Meerpohl: “Marguerite, um, can we agree that we have a discussion without Peter about the report, I’m totally with you on that, but when we start discussing general problems within Cochrane ... it will be good to have him in the room ...”

Koster interrupts ...

Meerpohl: “I think Peter is entitled to join in that discussion.”

Koster avoids replying to Meerpohl: “There are some issues about the Spokesperson Policy but [indecipherable] that are well beyond what we are doing.”

Meerpohl: “OK.”

Koster: “Thank you Peter – Peter, we will call you if anything needs discussing.”

I left the room. During the rest of the day, several board members suggested that I should be called back and participate in part of the meeting, but the co-chairs wouldn’t allow this.

I went into the library next door where Demasi, Pedersen and Bang were waiting for me.

The meeting was held on the premises of the Royal College of Surgeons. After a while, security staff turned up. They wanted to know who the third person was. He asked why. “For security reasons, in case there is a fire,” a woman responded. He laughed and said he didn’t believe that was the reason, which made her considerably distressed. It’s not nice to be revealed. He left the building, still anonymous, to join Pedersen who had already left.

Demasi and I were told that, since we were not surgeons, we were not allowed to sit in the library. This was also an odd pretence because there was coffee in the room and lunch for the board members would be served there later, although only two of them were surgeons, and also for me! While I discussed this with security, Burton came in, with a very stern look on his face, didn’t utter a word, and took away the coffee, tea, and water.

The next excuse was that an “anonymous source” had said that I did not belong to the board meeting and that I therefore needed to leave the building. They wouldn’t tell me who that source was. I documented to security that I was part of the meeting and told them that the only reason I was not in the board room was because they were discussing something for which I had a conflict, and that I would go back later. They still didn’t believe that I was part of the meeting, so I had to do a Google search to find Cochrane’s webpage that described who the board members were. We were then allowed to sit in the stairwell outside the board room where we met with Koster during the break who looked really irked and talked to the staff, presumably about how they could kick us out. She did not greet us or speak to us.

By the end of the day, when the going got rough and the co-chairs did not allow any discussion that could divert people from the preplanned outcome, Lamb said: “We should absolutely not finalise the decision until he has had the chance to talk, and we do need to genuinely consider what he has to say.” But Koster was really evil. She replied: “So, at this point we want to start talking about options on the table?” which was about ways they could use to exterminate me.

Another tactic used by the co-chairs was to get members to submit by exhaustion. The recordings reveal that they were both highly aggressive and focused on their task, and they were therefore not worn out, like the other board members were. Faba noted that some people were so aggressive that it did not facilitate the board’s decisions about whether something was good or bad.

If there had been any reasonable allegation against me, it should not have taken so long to get a majority vote. The arguments were recycled, like when you lose your way in a forest and hours later find out that you are back to where you started. When that happens, you are grateful if a leader takes you by the hand and escorts you out of the forest, no matter where you end up, just like in the “process” against me.

With two steely co-chairs, group dynamics ensure that the board members accept being brushed off, as they do not wish to be “difficult.” This pattern was seen the whole day, making the Kafkaesque show trial an interesting study in psychology and manipulation. In such circumstances, participants try to appease the leaders, even when they don’t agree with them. There were many examples of this where my supporters criticised some of my actions in a way, I doubt they would have done if they had not been under influence of group dynamics.

Another important lesson from studies of human psychology is that radicalisation of a group virtually always becomes worse with time. Group members want to impress their leaders, which they do by being even more radical than them. We have seen this in religious groups, in politics when dictatorial leaders arise to ultimate power, and during witch-hunts. A notorious example is the McCarthyism in the 1940s and 1950s, where US senator Joseph McCarthy spread fear of communist influence, which involved accusations of subversion or treason without proper regard for evidence.

Radicalisation can occur quickly, which the board meeting demonstrated. In the beginning, it was not clear to the board what the process was about, and the co-chairs did not make it clear to them. Little by little, the witch-hunt escalated and the arguments and allegations against me became more and more extreme. As there was no reason to expel me, it became a matter of so-called bad behaviour, which can be used against anyone, like accusing filmmakers of communist sympathies during the McCarthy era. I have never met anyone who has not behaved badly now and then; it is part of being.

We might also draw parallels to the Soviet show trials under Stalin. People were accused of being enemies of the state, which was all about ensuring Stalin's firm grip on power. Similarly, the show trial was all about ensuring Wilson's firm grip on power. I was accused of harming Cochrane, or potentially harming Cochrane, which is so vague that there is no escape. As an example of this, Nicky Cullum said: "He's anti-collaboration, he's the enemy within."

This reminds me of Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People*, from 1882. Dr Stockman finds out that the water in a popular bathing area, which is very important for the community's economy, is contaminated with bacteria. During that time, in Norway, it was a very serious matter to be found guilty of being an enemy of the people, as it could lead to being exiled.

A recurring theme at the meeting was that, although Counsel had exonerated me, the board referred to the charges again and again, as if I had not been acquitted. This applied not only to the Spokesperson Policy but also to the Collaboration Agreement.

An aggravating factor is that Koster admitted that these documents were unclear and should be revised. It should not be allowed to find anyone guilty of having breached rules no one understands.

The gem came when Koster said: "But they did feel that Peter broke the spirit of the policy if not the actual letter of the policy." Koster and Burton repeated this on 3 October in their [official letter](#) to me about why I had been expelled.

I tweeted their hilarious message on 9 October: "Has Cochrane become a religion? Will we see an Orwellian Cochrane thought police soon with CEO Mark Wilson as supreme judge?"

When a policy or a law hasn't been broken, it is irrelevant to speculate whether the "spirit" has been broken. A spirit is a vague concept that will be interpreted even more differently by people than the policy itself.

Both co-chairs lied profusely about me, also publicly, after my expulsion, and they refused to define what the board meant by my so-called bad behaviour when this became the official excuse for expelling me.

In one of his excellent analyses of the Cochrane scandal, Ryan Horath wrote:

"The 'seriously bad behaviour' is disagreeing with those who had the power to expel Gøtzsche and objecting to their behaviour. So, this appears to be the expulsion of a whistleblower arranged by those he accused of misconduct ... In what world does it make sense to threaten to close an entire Cochrane centre because its director asked for information on how and why so many children died in a study? Who wants to be a part of an organisation that prioritises the letterhead used to ask questions over answers about dead children? ... Dr. Gøtzsche's work makes him 'controversial.' The CEO of Cochrane is not a scientist. He comes from the business world. And in the business world, controversy is considered bad for the brand. And employees who rock the boat and do not fall in line with orders from above do not last long. Corporations are dictatorships, not democracies. The CEO brought a dictatorial mindset to Cochrane, and he believes Gøtzsche is bad for the 'brand.' Not being a scientist, he has no recognition that the work Gøtzsche does IS the brand. The ideal of science is not sitting by idly while science is perverted by moneyed interests. The ideal is someone who thoroughly vets the science being produced and is willing to challenge corruption at great personal risk. So, in the CEO's mind, any appearance of the Cochrane name next to Dr. Gøtzsche is bad for the brand."

## The Spokesperson Policy: Wilson's helping hand to the drug industry

The disputes between Wilson and me in relation to the interpretation of his Spokesperson Policy led to the chain of events that ended with my expulsion. It was mentioned 42 times during the board meeting. Another contentious and related issue was the Collaboration Agreement.

During the show trial, Hammerstein said:

"Every single conflict between the central executive board and Peter is about an issue where the central executive board takes the side of the pharmaceutical industry. And I can document this ... and we'll be able to open up ourselves to a unified brand and more funding."

Hammerstein warned that Cochrane was setting a dangerous precedent whereby industry representatives only had to "write a complaint to Cochrane and then Cochrane caves in under the pressure."

*BMJ's* Editor-in-Chief agreed. A week after my expulsion, she wrote that Cochrane should be committed to holding industry and academia to account, and that my expulsion from Cochrane reflected "a deep seated difference of opinion about [how close to industry is too close](#)."

Koster said that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy and added that Counsel "really felt that Peter's approach is misconceived and that he breached the Collaboration Agreement when he wrote to Dr Torrey."

This was not true. My letter to the funder that Torrey worked for had nothing to do with the Collaboration Agreement, which is about how the Nordic Cochrane Centre and the Cochrane Collaboration, represented by Mark Wilson, should collaborate. Moreover, Counsel had totally misunderstood this agreement, believing that Cochrane centres are only allowed to do Cochrane work, which is not correct. It is explicitly stated in [the agreement](#) that one of my tasks was to try to secure sufficient funding and in-kind support to allow the centre to deliver the functions set out for centres *and its own activity plans* (my emphasis).

Counsel [did not even state](#) that I had breached this agreement in relation to Torrey. He *presumed* I had breached it. So, he didn't find me guilty. No one could find me guilty unless they lied blatantly, which Koster did.

Counsel did not find either that my approach was "misconceived," which Koster claimed it was. Counsel wrote: "acting as an expert witness in a criminal trial ... has nothing whatsoever to do with the promotion of the core functions ... I cannot see how that has anything to do with the functions of a Cochrane Centre ... I do not think it can be said that he was speaking officially on behalf of Cochrane. As a result, I do not think the provision MW expressly relied upon in his 11 April 2018 email (being the same one that he relied upon about the Dr Torrey issue) can be said to have been breached ... I must say that I have some sympathy for PG's position here."

Counsel exonerated me from having broken the Spokesperson Policy and the Collaboration Agreement. He did not find me guilty of the former and could not find me guilty of the latter because he got the premise wrong.

Koster continued lying during the meeting. She said that Counsel "found to some degree, yes, he did breach the Spokesperson Policy," which was not true. She mentioned that Counsel considered the policy somewhat ambiguous; that it needed to be reviewed; and that changes should be made to make it much more clear.

Given this admission, it is remarkable that no one mentioned that I had tested the Spokesperson Policy empirically. As the results were very important for my defence, I had described them

in my report to Counsel. But the board had not had time to read the documents. The board should therefore have refused to carry on with Wilson’s show trial against me.

I cannot see any excuse for not reading at least the first three pages in my report. I explained already on page three that I had documented that the Spokesperson Policy is so ambiguous that it cannot be used to discipline Cochrane contributors or to tell them that they have violated it. This section even had the headline, *The Spokesperson Policy is highly ambiguous*. In addition, it is internally inconsistent, which can lead to opposite conclusions in similar cases depending on which parts in the policy one focuses on.

In the summer of 2018, I asked 24 people to read the policy and apply it on the three recent cases. I did not reveal anything about the dispute with Wilson in my email to the participants and kept a neutral tone. These people were the 7 members of my centre’s Advisory Board, the 5 directors of affiliated centres, the 3 editors of the Cochrane review groups based in Denmark and 9 researchers with whom I collaborated. I used a convenience sample, as I encroached on people’s time and wanted to get a high response rate quickly, as I had little time before the show trial.

We advise in Cochrane to make decisions based on the best available evidence, and the responses were therefore important. Twenty-one of the 24 people (88%) responded. The participants were asked to give their opinion about whether I had violated the policy and to respond to two additional questions:

“What is your view on the Spokesperson Policy? Is it unambiguous and therefore easy to interpret in relation to concrete cases?”

“Do you find that the policy ought to be improved?”

Here are the results:

	Yes	No	Not sure
Case 1, letter to US funder; was the policy violated?	4	10	7
Case 2, question on Twitter; was the policy violated?	2	11	8
Case 3, court case in Holland; was the policy violated?	1	9	11
Is the policy unambiguous and easy to interpret?	3	15	3
Ought the policy to be improved?	18	1	2

In all three cases, very few people felt I had broken the policy; very few people found it unambiguous and easy to interpret; and by far most people felt it should be improved. The respondents were asked to give their reasonings, and I shall mention a few.

About my letter to a US funder asking for details about deaths and their causes, people wrote:

- If such questions cannot be communicated directly by Cochrane centres, then it is time to discuss to close Cochrane as a global organisation.
- As this is a personal letter not intended for the public domain, I do not believe that the policy applies.
- I can’t see any reason as to why the document should represent any official Cochrane policy or that the request could be misinterpreted as anything else than what it is.

About our invitation to a seminar for psychiatrists on withdrawal of psychiatric drugs:

- I can’t see any statement that expresses Cochrane views.

- He makes no claim to speak on behalf of the Cochrane Collaboration.
- The document does not contain any information that could mislead people to think that this is an “official” Cochrane event.

About my role as an expert witness in a double homicide case in Holland:

- It is clearly indicated that this is your evaluation, not on behalf of Cochrane.
- You explicitly state that you speak on behalf of yourself and not on behalf of Cochrane.
- This particular letter is personal and so is not a public statement on behalf of Cochrane.

About the Spokesperson Policy:

- I think that “Cochrane-related issues” might be interpreted in different ways.
- I am not sure why such a document is needed.
- The document ignores the reality of who we are and what our history is.
- The difference between speaking on behalf of and stating one’s affiliation is not clear.
- It is as unclear as it can be.

If the Spokesperson Policy ought to be improved:

- The lack of respect for the thousands of contributors under local conditions who earn the money for the existence of the Collaboration is striking.
- The request to start every public statement with a declaration that this is “Cochrane” or “personal view” would generate a rather ridiculous picture for the public.
- It may appear that Cochrane is a centralised organisation where there is no general trust from the leadership that local directors behave well. The effect would be devastating, moving for example my reputation from the current perception of a respected authority in relation to methodological issues on a national level and beyond, to an employee of an office in London with no visible competence on the academic scale.
- What I find increasingly annoying is the recommendation to request authorisation from the Knowledge Translation department. This name looks like an embarrassing exaggeration, and it is a misnomer for a process which should be built around the communication in the local culture and not through a top down process from the English part of the world.
- You should be free to use your affiliation in any way that is in keeping with the wishes of the Nordic Cochrane Centre.
- You would have to write or say “Cochrane says” which is nonsense.
- The ambiguity causes unnecessary, destructive conflicts and it is used deliberately by outsiders to further their questionable agendas.
- The following requirement is often impossible to meet: “If you do use your Cochrane affiliation along with another title, or if Cochrane is the only title or affiliation you have, then it is incumbent upon you to state unequivocally and clearly that the views are your own and not those of Cochrane. This cannot be implied but must be stated explicitly.” Imagine stating that in a TV studio during a live interview. I cannot recall seeing anyone else doing that.

- The Cochrane Spokesperson policy, in its current form, requires far more than what is standard from other respected organisations and institutions. This is counterproductive.
- I cannot understand at all the hysteria about the issues and why Cochrane is so "afraid" of what could happen to their image. You always get the science right when you communicate, so ideally, Cochrane's organisation should support your (and others') conclusions.
- The policy should aim much more at ensuring academic freedom and plurality of opinions. The idea that a collaboration of so many people can have one single opinion is flawed, and Cochrane should aim more at making it clear that there is a plurality of opinions and ensure that these opinions are based on rigorous research, instead of pushing a corporate agenda of pretend-agreeing.
- It seems that "the views of the Cochrane Collaboration" almost exclusively represent the established view, and as such Cochrane loses its ability to set in motion the drastic changes that are needed in modern health care.
- An easy step could be to make it official Cochrane policy that unless a view is EXPLICITLY stated to be the view of the entire Cochrane Collaboration it should not be seen as such.
- The policy as it stands right now appears quite the opposite of what the Cochrane Collaboration is all about: it is vague, unclear, and it is obviously a "corporate" policy.
- I don't understand why the "burden of evidence" seems to have been reversed here. It is not very logical that you have to declare that you are NOT representing the Cochrane Collaboration. It should be the opposite, that only when you are representing the Cochrane Collaboration you should declare this very clearly. Otherwise it will not be possible for anyone, ever, to state anything without the risk of breaching the very vaguely-defined Spokesperson Policy.
- At present, the policy is ambiguous. This can result in researchers involved in the work related to Cochrane not fully engaging in all processes of their work (e.g. communication, collaboration, data collection) out of concerns of inadvertently violating the policy. This would of course be an unfortunate consequence and one that is not in the interest of Cochrane.

These criticisms are very convincing and illuminating. The Spokesperson Policy is a monster, which is deeply embarrassing for Cochrane. It is hard to believe, but it was even worse in its draft form in 2014. I commented on the draft, and the worst bit was this one:

If you are speaking based on your personal experience and expertise, and this has the possibility of contradicting Cochrane's evidence base, you need to state clearly that:

- This is not Cochrane's agreed policy.
- You are speaking in a personal capacity.
- You do not agree to your Cochrane title and/or affiliation being used to describe you. If this is not made clear at the time when such views are expressed, Cochrane will make this clear at the earliest possible opportunity.

Things are mixed up. Evidence base is not policy, it is science. And it would be very awkward to be forced to say or write every time in an academic debate when you don't agree 100% with a Cochrane review that you are speaking in a personal capacity. You might not even know that such

a review exists. This is not how academia works, and we should avoid making fools of ourselves in the public eye.

To demand that we hide our affiliation is both absurd and dishonest. People, including those who arrange debates, journalists, and others, will always use our titles and affiliations.

It is totally over the top to threaten people that if they did not make it clear, Cochrane will ensure that you will be publicly punished and humiliated or excommunicated from the Cochrane church.

### **Counsel's praise of those who paid him**

Danish journalist Bente Bundgaard interviewed me in Edinburgh for her articles in the *Journal of the Danish Medical Association (Ugeskrift for Læger)* and read [Counsel's report](#) on my website. She found it "amusing." So did I. There are priceless pearls of denial in it. It is obvious that if you pay a law firm to write a report about issues you have with another person, the law firm is not likely to criticise the person paying the bill, Mark Wilson, or his lapdog, Martin Burton.

Koster must have enjoyed the report. Counsel found Wilson's response to me "sincere and reasonable;" "he was wholly professional in his approach to Peter with respect to historic issues," "Wilson acted properly" (even in situations that involved serious bullying and lying); "Counsel was impressed by both men's professionalism, integrity and dedication to Cochrane" (by all means; Wilson and Burton are not likely to show their worst sides when being interviewed by a lawyer).

During the show trial, Koster said that Burton's 330-page binder to Counsel was made in good faith; that he was wholly impartial; and that Counsel, based on documentation, statements and interviews, did not find any credibility to any of the accusations I had raised about Burton's master-minding certain things and tampering with evidence.

Counsel wholly objected to my allegation that anyone had tampered with the minutes. With a gigantic British understatement, this is "interesting," given that I documented that this had happened, on several occasions, in [my report to Counsel](#).

Several board members told me that they found it problematic that it was often impossible to know who in the triumvirate - the CEO and the two co-chairs - was behind ideas, directions and tampering with the minutes and other evidence. Today, I would say it doesn't matter, as Wilson was behind everything. The co-chairs did not do anything of importance independently without Wilson's prior blessing, and they acted upon his orders.

I documented at length in my report to Counsel that Burton's summary document was not impartial or trustworthy, but in show trials, such trifles do not count.

Koster claimed that there was no evidence to support my accusations of a witch-hunt or bullying behaviour by Wilson and that Counsel felt that Wilson had behaved appropriately, both in March and April 2018. Koster had no problem glossing over the fact that Counsel dismissed Wilson's bullying behaviour where he called me a liar as an "isolated incident."

Koster said that it was wrong of me to bring this up at the board meeting and that the allegations were serious. It wasn't me but Meerpohl who brought up Wilson's bullying behaviour, as he was also bullied. And it was not an "allegation," as it happened, in front of four witnesses.

Even more absurdly, Marshall asked whether my so-called allegations against Wilson would be in breach of the code of the conduct of the trustees. If we adopt her line of reasoning, no one could ever criticise anything the CEO did. The board would be dead (which, in fact, it already was).

Counsel “wholly rejected” my documented instances of Wilson’s management by fear, and Koster added that trustees are supposed to make sure there is an environment that is good for the managers to work in. This issue was brought up repeatedly, especially by Marshall. No one said it was also the board’s responsibility to stop Wilson bullying and harassing people.

Many scandals and bankruptcies in the business world have occurred when the CEO became so powerful that the Board of Directors failed to live up to their oversight responsibility out of fear of being bullied, which meant that they did not dare ask uncomfortable questions. Many centre directors and other senior leaders told me about their concerns with Wilson’s management by fear, but they were afraid of speaking up for fear of retribution.

Hammerstein criticised Counsel for his value judgments. Also Burton talked about eminence, but in a different way: “It’s a false argument with respect to this issue of freedom of speech ... because there is a world that Peter lives in where ... he can say or do or print whatever he wants ... but as a trustee of Cochrane, as a member of Cochrane, as a senior centre director of a very eminent centre, you can’t.”

So, in Burton’s world, eminent researchers with a high status should not have freedom of speech. This ignores that eminent researchers became eminent because they spoke up and had scientific freedom to pursue their ‘controversial’ ideas. Burton’s view is detrimental for scientific organisations, which is why I have fought so hard against it that I was kicked out of Cochrane. But you could also ask: Who would want to be a member of such an organisation?

After Koster’s unconditional praise of the Great Leader based on Counsel’s report, Santesso told the board that there was a lot Counsel didn’t know about, e.g. Wilson’s behaviour, how he controlled things, and complaints about him from the Cochrane centres. Yet, she said, Counsel’s conclusions were that Wilson acted in the best way although there was other information that he didn’t. She also wondered how Counsel could make an educated judgement in this investigation when the information given to him was incomplete and biased.

When Santesso asked how this other information should be brought into the discussion, Koster said, “Let’s focus on this report and the facts here.” Facts? The whole thing was carefully staged and manipulated by Wilson and Burton, and inconvenient facts about them, which I had documented in my report, were ignored.

Santesso said that there were bigger issues than discussing letters and that it would be wrong to focus on that because there were massive issues going on that were not good. Koster adhered to her standard strategy saying that the bigger issues would be discussed later, which of course never happened.

But Santesso was persistent. It made no sense to her that I was singled out for not following the agreements (which I had, but Counsel misunderstood them), when half the centres didn’t follow them. She therefore wondered why Counsel made a conclusion about me and not the rest of the people.

Koster didn’t respond but interrupted her, another strategy of hers. When Santesso persisted, Koster interrupted her again: “I think we have to focus on the specific behaviour that Peter has.” Brilliant. I did what everyone else did or would like to do if they dared challenge the Great Leader, so I should disappear. Elementary logic for witch-hunters.

Tracey Howe adopted the co-chairs’ tactic: “I think we need to be very specific on the documentation that we’ve got. Anything else is hearsay.” By all means. What had not been carefully concocted by Wilson and Burton – even if they were facts - was hearsay and irrelevant.

Meerpohl grilled her a little later: “It’s a bit like looking at published trials and ignoring unpublished trials ... as board members, our responsibility goes beyond judging what’s in front of us.”

Very rarely, a friendly board member tried to distract the misanthropic ladies from their witch-hunt, which they seemed to enjoy. Faba asked people to respect the diversity (which is one of Cochrane’s core principles) and said that people have different ways of thinking and behaving and that the board therefore needed to be very tolerant and receptive. When Hammerstein supported Faba’s comments, Koster added spitefully:

“Without being babysitters.”

### **My criticism of psychiatric drugs was the main reason for my expulsion**

The main reason for my expulsion was my criticism of psychiatric drugs. I have researched this area intensively since 2007, have had seven PhD students, and have published numerous scientific articles and two books<sup>39 40</sup> about psychiatry. My overall, firmly evidence-based, conclusion, which concurs with what the general public thinks, that psychiatric drugs do much more harm than good, was not popular at Cochrane headquarters.

Three of the 52 groups in Cochrane are mental health groups, and even though it might be tolerated if you nibble at the edges of a medical discipline with criticism, it cannot be tolerated that you document that the entire specialty does more harm than good, as Robert Whitaker, founder of [Mad in America](#), told me and has also documented.<sup>41</sup>

When psychiatric patients, very often against the advice of their doctors, withdraw from their many psychiatric drugs slowly, one by one, and discover they are able to live a normal life, they often call themselves psychiatric survivors. In no other specialty do patients recover and then feel this way about their doctors. If patients survive a heart attack, they are grateful to their cardiologists. In psychiatry, it is the opposite. It is a challenge to survive the harmful effects of the many pills that make life miserable.

Since the patients and critical psychiatrists appreciate what I do, Cochrane should have appreciated it, too. I am a member of the Critical Psychiatry Network based in the UK, which mainly has psychiatrists as members; was winner of the Annual Award for the National Association for Psychiatry Users (LAP) in Denmark in 2014; co-founded the Council for Evidence-based Psychiatry in London in 2014; won an award from the International Society of Ethical Psychology and Psychiatry for “intellectual honesty and bravery in tackling the biomedical-industrial complex” in 2014; was top ten finalist in 2015 for the award “Dane of the year,” nominated by psychiatric patients; became protector for the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark in 2016; and co-founded the International Institute for Psychiatric Drug Withdrawal in Göteborg in 2017.

Hammerstein mentioned during the board meeting that the use of depression pills in children in Denmark had gone down 40% thanks to me.<sup>42</sup> I believe he is right.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly psychiatry and organised denial](#). Copenhagen: People’s Press; 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mental health survival kit and withdrawal from psychiatric drugs](#). Ann Arbor: L H Press; 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Whitaker R. [Anatomy of an epidemic](#), 2nd edition. New York: Broadway Paperbacks; 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Usage of depression pills almost halved among children in Denmark](#). Mad in America 2018; 4 May.

<sup>43</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mental health survival kit and withdrawal from psychiatric drugs](#). Ann Arbor: L H Press; 2022.

The documentary film, [Diagnosing Psychiatry](#), about my reform work was released in 2017 by a filmmaker who had followed me for four years around the globe. I have contributed to many other documentaries and as an expert witness in lawsuits about the harms of psychiatric drugs.

## 2015: The Maudsley debate

In May 2015, I pointed out in a [BMJ](#) article after the Maudsley debate in London I contributed to that long term use of psychiatric drugs does more harm than good and that they should be used very sparingly. As a courtesy, I sent *BMJ's* press release four days in advance to David Tovey, Cochrane's Editor-in-Chief, and to the editors of the three Cochrane mental health groups.

They did not return my kindness. All four of them joined forces and published an embarrassing letter as a rapid response in *BMJ* connected to my article where they seriously undermined my scientific credibility. This was not a contribution to a sound scientific debate but was about protecting turfs and the excessive use of harmful drugs.

Several editors of Cochrane groups told me they were dismayed that these four editors, in Schopenhauer's words, had appealed to "authority rather than reason" to denigrate my research, which they felt shouldn't happen in Cochrane. I needed to defend my reputation, and in my reply in the print version of *BMJ*, I wrote that journalists and others had interpreted the Cochrane editors' denigration of my research as a thinly disguised attempt at protecting psychiatry's guild interests, and some even suspected that they also tried to protect the drug industry. The Cochrane editors did the patients a great disservice, but [Wilson forced me to publish an apology](#) in *BMJ* and threatened to close my centre if I didn't.

Tovey is a doctor and his view on my work was very different to Wilson's. He wrote to me two weeks after the *BMJ* debate:

"We do not differ anywhere near as much as you think. I read your last book from cover to cover [[Deadly Medicines and Organised Denial](#), which has two chapters on psychiatry] and have recommended it to many people since. I am entirely committed to the view that the benefits of psychotropic medicines have been systematically overestimated, and the harms underestimated ... it seemed to me that the nature of the debate and the brevity of the article did not permit you the opportunity to make the case sufficiently strongly. I hope that we will get a chance to discuss this issue in a friendly and mutually respectful fashion when we meet."

There is a good reason why there is not much in the [Cochrane Tapes](#) that reveal I was kicked out of Cochrane mainly because of my consistent criticism of psychiatry. The 330 pages of my so-called wrongdoings 15 years back in time that Burton sent to Counsel contained a lot about psychiatry, but Counsel exonerated me and did not find any reason to censure me.

## Our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review contributed to my expulsion

It was my criticism of psychiatric drugs that made Wilson decide in April 2018 that I must disappear. On 27 July 2018, only 17 days before the show trial, my research group, Lars Jørgensen, Tom Jefferson and myself, published a criticism<sup>44</sup> of the prestigious Cochrane HPV vaccine review,

---

<sup>44</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. [The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias](#). *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine* 2018; 27 July.

which came out in May 2018.<sup>45</sup> The Cochrane review was hugely delayed; the protocol for the review was published [seven years earlier](#).

Remarkably, *HPV* appears 48 times in the transcript of the board meeting. There is no doubt that my criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review played an important role for my expulsion, and the board's official announcements that this played no role were untruthful. Even my defenders reproached me heavily for not having contacted the Cochrane review team in advance of the publication of our criticism of the review, but this was because they had not read the board papers.

We *did* warn the people responsible for the Cochrane review ahead of our publication. The board material included a letter from Jefferson from 27 August where he wrote that he peer reviewed the Cochrane review; warned the Cochrane Editorial Unit repeatedly between November 2016 and March 2018; sent essential data; and explained we were working on our own systematic review of the HPV vaccines. Although he tried to help the Cochrane authors with avoiding bias in their review, he did not get any feedback. He also explained that he and I were not forewarned that our criticism had been published online as a preprint.

I explained, also [in the board material](#), that our paper was published on a Friday, and that I clarified to the first author of the Cochrane review, Marc Arbyn, already on the Monday, why I had been unable to inform them about our upcoming paper:

"It is my first day at work after holidays. It seems that a criticism of your Cochrane review we (three researchers from the Nordic Cochrane Centre) have written has just been published as a prepublication over the weekend, so I wish to inform you immediately and attach our paper ... I copy the managing editor and Cochrane's Editor-in-Chief."

Two days later, I wrote to the same people, after having found out what had happened:

"PS. Our paper was prepublished on 27 July. I did not even know it had been accepted. The journal only wrote to the first author and asked him to look at the proofs. He did not copy me, as he knew I was on holiday. I would have wished to inform you earlier but that turned out not to be possible. The first author is a PhD student with me. I will, from now on, ensure that I am always the corresponding author on all papers, which I publish with junior researchers so that I will always know what goes on."

It was the board's duty to know about this, but they didn't. In contrast, they knew about a [misleading comment](#) that David Tovey, Editor-in-Chief, and his deputy, Karla Soares-Weiser, published on the Cochrane website on 3 September: "We regret that the authors, who are all members and officeholders within Cochrane, did not share their analysis or the conclusions and criticisms contained in the *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine* article before publication."

They published this comment in bad faith because Tovey knew it wasn't my fault that we did not inform the Cochrane authors and that it had been my intention to inform them in advance. The misinformation from the Cochrane editors was spread to everyone in Cochrane using general email lists like [centres@lists.cochrane.org](mailto:centres@lists.cochrane.org).

It was devastating for me that the board had not done its homework. Even my supporters at the board condemned me, not knowing that it was not my fault that the Cochrane authors had not been contacted in advance:

Clarkson: "Nothing was done when it was published. They didn't, none of the authors actually contacted that review team."

---

<sup>45</sup> Arbyn M, Xu L, Simoens C, Martin-Hirsch PP. [Prophylactic vaccination against human papillomaviruses to prevent cervical cancer and its precursors](#). Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2018 May 9;5(5):CD009069.

Meerpohl: "What I am totally frustrated about with Peter is that when he decided to do this, the way he behaved ... is totally unacceptable. He should have let those people know – and David - that 'I am working on this, I have made the decision to submit it elsewhere for whatever reason' ... the way Peter behaved tipped it over for me."

Gartlehner: "I'm not defending Peter's behaviour, it's terrible. It's a behavioural problem, it totally lacks common courtesy."

Santesso: "I just wanted to agree with Gerald ... unfortunately there are issues with Peter's behaviour and I totally agree."

Cullum: "Doing nothing is not an option. And this behaviour is never going to change."

Howe: "I think that this has not only undermined ... the author team but the review group and the whole of the Cochrane processes ... that's an attack on the organisation really."

Marshall: "One of the things that really distresses me ... it didn't come through Cochrane first ... people who have worked their guts out to get their review published ... I worry about what women are thinking and what their health is and the people that this charity is there for. And I want to give them the best advice and 'bitching' outside the tent really doesn't help. I want us to be an organisation that women can trust if they want to know what the evidence is and then they can make their own choices. But they need to have reliable information from Cochrane."

Faba: "I think that all this controversial position between Peter's decision and others could be resolved by ... teamwork, and afterwards published ... It's important that Cochrane as an organisation ... giving trusted evidence, should have 'one position' ... if we show two different points, we make a confusion in the policy making."

Marshall: "It's people's lives."

Faba: "Yeah."

Lamb: "The proper way of dealing with it would be to try and deal with it internally, and then, if he still wasn't happy and wanted to go public, then you should resign from the board."

All these nine board members got it completely wrong. We *did* try to collaborate but were not welcomed. We *did* warn people, repeatedly, also verbally, e.g. I warned Tovey at a gathering in Koster's hotel room in Seoul two years earlier. We paid respect to the women who needed to know. We provided sound scientific criticism, which has nothing to do with how hard people work to get their review published or with what women are thinking.

Marshall wanted Cochrane to be an organisation women can trust, but we explained in our paper that the Cochrane HPV vaccine review was influenced by reporting bias and biased trial designs. It was therefore not "Trusted evidence," which is part of Cochrane's motto.

Why would Marshall betray the trust of the millions of women interested in knowing the full scope of harms and benefits of the HPV vaccines in order to prevent a bit of embarrassment of authors who failed to carry out a rigorous review? The review did not meet the standards for Cochrane reviews or the needs of those that consult Cochrane to make "Informed decisions," which is also part of Cochrane's motto. And if scientific disagreements are censored, people will be even less well informed.

We published an even stronger criticism of the Cochrane review four days after I was expelled.<sup>46</sup> We demonstrated that important harms of the vaccines were missing, although they were listed in the publications the authors had assessed. It was very difficult to compare the trials

---

<sup>46</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. [The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias: Response to the Cochrane editors](#). 2018; 17 September.

the Cochrane authors had included with ours because the trial identifiers were very different. In contrast to the Cochrane review, we used clinical study reports we had obtained from the European Medicines Agency, which are much more reliable than published trial reports. We found that the Cochrane HPV review should have included at least 35% more females.

The Cochrane review did not find an increase in serious neurological harms. We did and published it in Jørgensen's PhD dissertation and later in a [medical journal](#).<sup>47</sup>

There are no Cochrane rules demanding that we should first address criticism internally and get it published as part of the Cochrane review, before we go external. People who claim this is the case have defined Cochrane as a social club, and not as a scientific organisation. Furthermore, Cochrane processes for investigating internal complaints rarely work. It took 19 months for a research team in Pamplona to get their criticism of a Cochrane review of methylphenidate for ADHD published as part of the review. My research group also criticised the review. Two weeks later, the review was withdrawn because it was of very poor quality.<sup>48</sup> One of the critics asked the Editor-in-Chief and the editor for the review group that withdrew the review to issue a press release, which they refused. Like a drug company, Cochrane only publishes positive messages. This is what Wilson called "branding" and "trusted evidence."

Sometimes, relevant criticism of a Cochrane review is never published as part of the Cochrane review even though this is obligatory. I have experienced this several times.

Since Cochrane aims to help people make informed decisions, criticism of Cochrane reviews should be applauded and promptly published, not chastised or ignored. Cochrane even has an annual prize for it: "Cochrane values constructive criticism of its work and publicly recognises this through the Bill Silverman Prize ... with a view to helping to improve its work, and thus achieve its aim of helping people make well-informed decisions about health care."

Cochrane's Spokesperson Policy also encourages criticism of Cochrane reviews: "Many Cochrane contributors are experts in their field and have every right to discuss their work and express their personal views – this may include expressing opinions on Cochrane policies and Cochrane reviews ... Cochrane contributors may sometimes be asked or wish to comment on published reviews. In doing so they can speak freely, including expressing views that are critical. This is in line with Cochrane's established tradition of academic and scientific debate."

This was hypocritical. I did what the policy encouraged, but this led to my expulsion. We are experts on the HPV vaccines, which we have studied in more detail than anyone else, and we therefore had an ethical duty to highlight the flaws in the Cochrane review.

In our published [criticism from 27 July](#), we noted that "Most of the 14 Cochrane authors on the first published protocol for the Cochrane review had major conflicts of interest related to the HPV vaccine manufacturers." The Cochrane editors had turned a blind eye to the fact that far more than the allowed 49% of the authors had major conflicts of interest in relation to the HPV vaccine manufacturers. Many of them were removed after outsiders had protested.

When we published [our second article](#) on 17 September, we noted that the lead and primary author of the Cochrane review, Marc Arbyn, had several financial ties to the vaccine manufacturers, which he had failed to declare. As this was not allowed according to Cochrane rules, we complained about it. Our criticism was deferred to the Cochrane funding arbiters, which led to an amusing

---

<sup>47</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. [Benefits and harms of the human papillomavirus \(HPV\) vaccines: systematic review with meta-analyses of trial data from clinical study reports](#). Syst Rev 2020;9:43.

<sup>48</sup> Boesen K, Saiz LC, Erviti J, Storebø OJ, Gluud C, Gøtzsche PC, Jørgensen KJ. The Cochrane Collaboration withdraws a review on methylphenidate for adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Evid Based Med 2017;22:143-7.

comment by a *BMJ* journalist: “Asking them to arbitrate may not be seen as a perfect answer, given that the original declaration of interests in the HPV review said that its authors had been approved by the same committee, ‘based on stringent Cochrane conflict of interest guidelines.’”<sup>49</sup>

The funding arbiters resolved that Arbyn had not breached the policy by not declaring his involvement in two organisations funded in whole or part by manufacturers of the vaccines and HPV tests because he had not gained personal financial benefit and because the support was provided through institutions.<sup>50</sup> Tom Jefferson from our research team said to the journalist that, “the cash comes from sponsors even if it is routed through the North Pole [Santa Claus] and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.”

Faba misunderstood the nature of Cochrane. It is not a policy setting organisation, and in science, there are rarely clear and exhaustive answers, which is why free debate is so important. Moreover, Cochrane is not about having one position about interventions; Cochrane should have no positions but just convey the facts. My research team has no position about the HPV vaccines, and we have never given that impression.

Faba suggested that our differences could be resolved by teamwork and published together, but that was not realistic. The Cochrane team that authored the HPV vaccine review did not even respond to us. Further, science thrives best if independent groups look at the same issue. Otherwise, we all fall in the trap of cognitive bias.

Lamb’s comment means that if a review group refuses to publish relevant criticism of a Cochrane review from a board member, and the member goes public to serve the patients, that member would need to resign from the board.

Gartlehner opined that Tovey had written a very good [rebuttal](#) of our criticism “and if half of the cited studies were actually duplicates what does that mean to other work that Peter did. What does that mean about his books? So, I think the reputational issue is probably larger for Peter than Cochrane.”

Gartlehner was misguided. In [our response](#) to the “rebuttal” published by the Cochrane eminences, the Editor-in-Chief, David Tovey and his Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Karla Soares-Weiser, we provided an even stronger criticism of the HPV vaccine review.<sup>51</sup> Why did Gartlehner make this outlandish remark? He knew that I am not a person who would make such errors in my science. And even though I was not involved with data collection and data extraction, he knew that I carefully choose the people I work with, which make important errors unlikely.

Tovey and Soares-Weiser were offered the opportunity to respond in the same journal as the one where we had published our criticism, *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*. They did not accept this offer but published their reply on the Cochrane website, where we could not reject their arguments, as we did not have access to this site. This is how the drug industry operates.

Many of the suggestions made by board members implied that scientists cannot be board members, and that we should prioritise protecting the reputation of Cochrane over having a free public debate about the science. This is also how the drug industry operates. Its employees are obliged to protect the sales of drugs and therefore cannot criticise the company’s research publicly.

---

<sup>49</sup> Hawkes N. Cochrane examines whether lead author of HPV review had undeclared conflicts of interest. *BMJ* 2018;363;k4163.

<sup>50</sup> Hawkes N. Lead author of Cochrane HPV review did not breach conflicts policy, find arbiters. *BMJ* 2018;363:k4352.

<sup>51</sup> Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. [The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias: Response to the Cochrane editors](#). 2018; 17 September.

Santesso remarked that she would not criticise anything publicly, as she would be afraid of being treated like me. She also wondered why my actions always seemed to come to the board's attention while others' actions didn't, even though they did the same thing.

Some are more equal than others in Cochrane. During my short presence at the board meeting in the morning, I tried to explain what it meant that Wilson and Tovey had recently exonerated one of their own staff for having done the same as I did. Early in the morning on the day before the board meeting, I asked Burton to send three documents to the board, two of which were very important for my defence. One was a [complaint by Jefferson](#) that Toby Lasserson, an employee of Wilson and Tovey, had possibly broken the Spokesperson Policy in his Cochrane editorial from 4 August about the Cochrane HPV vaccine review. The other was [the reply to Jefferson](#) by Wilson and Tovey from 3 September, which exonerated Lasserson. I explained to Burton that these two letters were crucial for understanding how Wilson interpreted the Spokesperson Policy.

Burton responded the same day with a nonsense diversion: "We have acted at all times on the advice of our lawyers." As my request had nothing to do with legal issues, he used Schopenhauer's recipe: "Appeal to authority rather than reason," which is the antithesis of Cochrane.

Burton avoided explaining why he did not want to include the two letters, which were so important that I photocopied a page I intended to hand out to the board. There was no good reason whatsoever why he should refuse this, e.g. Counsel's report arrived 12 hours later the same day. But of course, Burton dared not go against Wilson. These two documents would totally undermine the idea that I had broken Wilson's Spokesperson Policy at any time.

The emails from the co-chairs leading up to the board meeting were of such a character that I dared not send the two letters to the board myself, also because one of the two groundless accusations I faced was that I was not entitled to send the two emails I sent to the board in April when Wilson threatened to close my centre. As noted above, this was a catch-22. Whether I had sent them or not, I was bound to lose.

I wasn't even allowed to hand out the photocopies. As soon as I had started explaining what they were about and that Lasserson had definitely come up with personal views in his editorial, without any disclaimer, I was interrupted by Koster: "I don't think we want to get into these because they weren't part of the materials that were given to everyone." Catch-22 again. The proof of my innocence had deliberately been held back! Stalin would have been proud of Burton and would have invited him into his inner circle.

I insisted and said that Wilson and Tovey had argued that such views did not represent Cochrane's official policy unless it was explicit in the text. This is what I had always argued the Spokesperson Policy should be about: The views you express are your own unless you explicitly say they represent official Cochrane policy. But in *Animal Farm*, some pigs are more equal than others, particularly if they are close to the leading pig, Napoleon, an apt name for creatures that strive for absolute power.

Koster interrupted me again, with several untruthful remarks. Schopenhauer called it "Claim victory despite defeat," which he considered an impudent trick. Koster claimed that I had said I had submitted this information to Counsel, and that she thought everyone had read it and understood what my position was.

First, I had not submitted this information to Counsel and could not have done it, as the [highly revealing document](#) by Wilson and Tovey only became available four days after the deadline for the submission of my report. As they responded to a simple question posed one month earlier by

Jefferson, the delay looked deliberate to me, to ensure that I could not make their document part of my defence.

Second, even if I had submitted this information, the board members would not have had time to read it.

Third, they had not understood what my position was, or did not want to understand it, as they repeatedly said during the meeting that I had broken the Spokesperson Policy, which wasn't true.

During the discussions of the HPV vaccine affair at the secret board meeting, Hammerstein was the only reasonable board member. He did not buy into the idea that my behaviour was horrible because I had not informed the Cochrane authors about our upcoming criticism. He was also the only one who noted that there were conflicts of interest related to the HPV review; that the review was problematic; and that our criticism of it was key to my expulsion:

"This is all very depressing ... what people will see is the HPV criticism will be the straw that broke the camel's back. From what I've heard, some very prestigious people ... including some of the founders of Cochrane are going to ask for a retraction of the HPV review, and the first signatory of the review hid his conflict of interest while receiving ... money from GlaxoSmithKline [that sells an HPV vaccine] ... I don't know what kind of money he was receiving, if it's 'directly' money on vaccines ... I think that [Peter's] exclusion from Cochrane is something he is prepared for and it's going to have a great cost and unfortunately, there's a whole bunch of other issues, that have nothing to do with Peter, that I found out about, that are kind of being swept under the table ... Cochrane is not adhering to a lot of its basic principles of transparency and conflicts of interest and things like that ... people don't think about the trees, they think about the forest and I think we have to think about that."

Burton tried to eat the cake and have it at the same time: "We're not going to discuss science specifically," but then claimed that the Cochrane eminences rebutted our paper and that our criticism was not correct. He added that there is "a degree of 'hyperbole', overstating the case, it was immoderate. The existence of the paper is bad enough, but it was immoderate as well."

Burton misrepresented the issues. Our criticism was appropriate and relevant.

Hammerstein: "We're talking about a massive worldwide debate about the HPV vaccine ... it enriches the reputation of Cochrane that there are different points of view ... The editorial that was published by Cochrane said, 'We hope that this review will be used to support policy or personal decision making about HPV vaccination that is informed by the best current evidence, balancing facts rather than opinions' ... There was no disclaimer that this was a personal opinion. Very few editorials are so clear in calling on people to use a certain treatment ... So, there was a tremendous marketing operation for the HPV vaccine ... and then there are the scientific questions, which we're not going to talk about, you know - that there was no comparison with placebo and secondary effects ... You're confronting something that is a massive tidal wave, it's on every daily news program of all of Europe. To say, well, I'm going to submit it and we'll see six months from now, inside Cochrane, might not be realistic for people who are really on top of this issue and investigating it ... The investigators might feel bad ... but the reality is that this is a drop in the ocean compared to what is the 'Knowledge Translation' that was done by Jo Anthony, at Cochrane headquarters. And I know from some of the members of the Cochrane in Spain that the knowledge translation was done in an exaggerated way, without any doubts, without any uncertainties, and using people as external experts that have conflicts of interest with GlaxoSmithKline. This is worrisome."

Burton: "It doesn't say that women should or shouldn't be taking vaccines."

Hammerstein: "Well but the knowledge translation that was sent to South America was very, very clear in supporting it ... Cochrane has done a review that has shown that this is a great vaccine and that everyone should take it ... I heard it myself spontaneously, looking at the daily TV news program."

Clarkson: "When you talk about 'knowledge translation,' are you talking about something that has been issued by Cochrane to translate the message?"

Hammerstein: "Yes, what was sent to South America. I'm talking about members of Cochrane, saying, who contacted me about this, I had to leave this because it was tremendously exaggerated the way, it wasn't well presented by the knowledge translation people."

Burton: "So, was that centrally, the Central Editorial Unit, the people responsible for it?"

Hammerstein: "Yes, centrally."

Hammerstein hit the nail on the head again. Cochrane's internal process for relevant scientific criticism did not work; Cochrane had become a marketing machine; and the drug industry would gain the most from this.

Cochrane's PR was shameless and embarrassing. The announcement of the review on [cochrane.org](http://cochrane.org) under "News" included a "Science Media Centre roundup of third-party expert reaction to this review." Six experts were cited - all from the UK, although Cochrane is an international organisation. Two had financial conflicts of interest with the HPV vaccine manufactures. A third was responsible for vaccinations in Public Health England that promotes the vaccines. The experts highlighted the "intensive and rigorous Cochrane analysis," and that "the vaccine causes no serious side-effects." None of the experts criticised the review or expressed any caution.

We wrote in our paper from 27 July that people with conflicts of interest in relation to the manufacturers should not be quoted and that Richard Smith - former editor of the *BMJ* - described medical journals as an extension of the marketing arm of the drug industry.

Jo Anthony, Cochrane's new Head of the Knowledge Translation department, had wanted Juan Erviti, editor in the Cochrane Hypertension Group, to promote the HPV vaccines in Colombia. Because of his impressive achievements in Spain, Wilson had invited him to join the Knowledge Translation group, which he did, but he did not understand why Cochrane felt its HPV vaccine review was so important. At the Cochrane Editors' meeting in Lisboa in March 2018, the editors were much against making recommendations, but Cochrane headquarters did not respect this. In fact, Anthony told Erviti that Cochrane had created a lot of activity on social media about the HPV review. As it turned out, Erviti was not chosen for a part-time editing job with Cochrane headquarters because his views were similar to those of Hammerstein and me about what Cochrane should be doing.

In 2016, the Cochrane Collaboration received a grant of \$1.15 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates is known for being very industry friendly and supportive of patents, and one of his major projects seemed to be propagating the use of the HPV vaccines throughout the world. [Gates' approach has been criticised](#) by Doctors without Borders because it focuses on introducing new expensive vaccines — rather than shifting to a stronger emphasis on improving basic health services and immunisations.

Many people have told me that they lost their high regard for Cochrane reviews because of the HPV vaccine review and the way it was marketed by Cochrane headquarters. It made Cochrane

look like a drug company. Many people have also criticised the Gates donation. The very hostile reactions to our criticism of the HPV vaccines review, including the likely orchestrated letters calling for my removal from the board (see next page), could be related to this.

Later, the board discussed an article published on 30 July in the *BMJ* that I was not involved with, which criticised Cochrane for its lack of leadership in supporting innovation and open science for clinical trials.<sup>52</sup> The authors, which included several Cochrane editors and a previous co-chair of the Steering Group, encouraged Cochrane to create a policy that allows open data sharing and to make explicit any concerns they have so that these can be resolved. One of the authors gave his address as “Cochrane incontinence,” but although there was no disclaimer that these were his personal views, the board did not reproach him. His name wasn’t Peter Gøtzsche, which makes all the difference.

The general view of the board was that Cochrane people should raise their criticism in the “family,” and not publicly.

Marshall: “I personally don’t think we should have these sorts of surprises. If people want to tell us that we’re doing something wrong, please, we would love our friends and our family to tell us that.”

Meerpohl proved her wrong: “The reason why this has been published is because it has been raised at least two or three times at Annual General Meetings over the last five years. The issue of open access to open data and charitable organisations ... what more processes can there be to raise an issue, and if nothing happened what else can you do than to go public? ... if things move too slowly for people, they get frustrated and they have to find a way to express their frustration ... it’s like blaming the messenger again ... we are moving too slow in their view, and we can’t blame them for that.”

My research group wanted to get our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review out quickly for public benefit, which is why we published it in a journal with a quick turnaround. Like Meerpohl, I have experienced Cochrane delays of five years. It took five years, from 2001 to 2006, with painstakingly slow processes, before we were allowed to publish the harms of mammography screening in our Cochrane review.<sup>53</sup>

It also took five years, from 2001 to 2006, and numerous emails and requests at meetings and to committees, before I succeeded to get empty graphs out of Cochrane reviews, although it is highly unprofessional to publish page after page with empty graphs. Some people defined many outcomes in their protocol and constructed graphs for them before they knew if there were any data. The curious reply I got when I complained was that it was good to display these graphs, as they indicated that there was a lack of data, and that they were nice to have in case any future trials contained these data. The worst of this was that the chief Cochrane programmer, who worked for me in Copenhagen, told me early on that it would be easy to prevent empty graphs from being seen and printed, with a simple command. So, it took five years for a simple command. Cochrane has never been effective, and it became much worse with Wilson’s huge bureaucracy.

### **Burton likely orchestrated letters of complaint about the HPV vaccine affair**

It was highly suspicious that [three remarkably similar letters](#) that all called for my expulsion from the board because I had criticised the Cochrane HPV vaccine review were sent to Martin Burton

---

<sup>52</sup> Shokraneh F, Adams CE, Clarke M, et al. Why Cochrane should prioritise sharing data. *BMJ* 2018;362:k3229.

<sup>53</sup> Gøtzsche PC. Mammography screening: truth, lies and controversy. London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2012.

between 2 and 5 September, immediately after I had submitted my report to Counsel on 30 August where I, among many other things, documented Burton's maladministration.

One was from the Cochrane editor of a mental health group, Geraldine Macdonald, and two were from previous co-chairs of the board, Cindy Farquhar and Jonathan Craig. This was so suspicious that the board discussed at length whether they had been orchestrated by Burton. I have no doubt that this was the case. It is a grave offence, like when the police plants evidence at a crime scene. The discussion was highly revealing, and I shall therefore describe it in some detail.

Santesso: "Were these solicited letters or were these volunteered?"

Burton interrupts: "for the avoidance of any doubt whatsoever, but on the principle that people might still think that I'm waging some kind of ... none of these letters were solicited by me, and to my knowledge, none of these people colluded with each other, although I don't know for certain. They had no more access to information as anyone else ... So, we've handled this entirely appropriately."

Santesso: "So, were other letters solicited actually?"

Burton: "So, so, so, so, soliciting is suggesting that your co-chairs or other members who should be acting in their best interest, were going out and trying to encourage people to write. We did not do that. But we specifically said to people, we cannot recommend or, or we, we refuse, because of our position, to say either you should or shouldn't write. Everything must be entirely up to you. If people asked us that, that's what we said."

Clarkson: "Do you think, I don't understand the, the body language, are you saying..."

Burton: "You, you, you tell me what behaviour you're alleging ... any behaviour alleging to me, that is at all, at all, at all impropriety, I will tell you what I think so, so, please tell me what you think?"

Santesso: "I, I know for a fact, that you pursued someone to submit a letter."

Burton: "But, but that's not true, that's not true. Absolutely not true. So, so, so, so ..."

Santesso: "I know for a fact!"

Burton: "So, so, OK, so other people said they were going to, other people actually did submit a letter, there were letters submitted, which were then withdrawn, because the [stumbling] ... this is serious."

Santesso: "It is serious, because we have to know that these letters came about, you know, um..."

Burton interrupts: "These, these letters came about because these people spontaneously wrote to us. There's no, um ... And if you're suggesting otherwise, I take great exception to that."

Hammerstein: "They knew there was a process with the Counsel, so it wasn't ... I'm not saying you..."

Marshall interrupts: "No, no-one knows ..."

Burton: "No, no ... to this day, Cindy knew because she was an ex-co-chair. But to this day, as far as I know, not a soul and certainly not Jonathan Craig and Macdonald had no idea anything was going on with Counsel, it's a confidential inquiry ... Now, since you have raised this, two other people wrote a letter, and asked that letter, for that letter to be kept confidential - the lawyer said it couldn't be kept confidential and that we had to send it to Peter. So then that letter was withdrawn. And another person said that they would write a letter and discussed writing a letter with mentors and came to the conclusion that they would not be able to write a letter. There's nothing else to say in addition to that."

Clarkson: "I am really concerned Nancy, about what you are saying."

Hammerstein: "Yeah, I'm concerned about it."

There seemed to be something grave that Burton tried to hide. His habitual stutter tended to become worse when he got in trouble, and three of the resigned board members have told me that he got red in his face when Santesso challenged him. If there had not been any problems, one would have expected this discussion to have ended in a few minutes. Instead, the discussion took up half an hour, and already this early, Burton contradicted himself. He said that the letter writers had no more access to information than anyone else, but also said that Farquhar knew because she was ex-co-chair, and she sent one of the letters.

Koster: "I was copied on all the correspondence, and there was never a sugg ..."

Santesso: "You were not copied on that correspondence!"

Howe: "Nancy, what you're suggesting is an extremely serious allegation."

Santesso "Yeah, I have it, I have it, yeah, but I think, you know, they weren't included. I guess we just have to really say ..."

Burton interrupts: "Did they, did they write a letter?"

Santesso: "Yeah and took it back too. And was pursued and felt pursued to write that letter. But maybe if you can really confirm that these other letters were not pursued, then I would be OK."

Burton interrupts: "So, so, so, there's a letter written, which was marked strictly confidential, it was actually printed across the front of it."

Santesso: "I don't think I know that letter."

Meerpohl: "I think the problem is pursuing someone."

Clarkson: "So the situation is that Martin in effect has written to somebody asking for them to submit a letter of complaint and that you've got evidence of that?"

Santesso: "Yeah, and just pursuing and afterwards..."

Burton interrupts: "What do you mean pursuing?"

Santesso: "Well ..."

Clarkson: "Once they've put something in?"

Santesso: "No, just actually before it was put in. So ..."

Burton interrupts: "Honestly, I just, I just, I, I have no recollection of this at all. I thought I was, I honestly thought that I hadn't, that we'd been very even handed in handling anything with this. I mean, I copied ..."

Koster interrupts: "Believe me there was no orchestrated plan to solicit letters. Things just came in and then we responded to them."

Cullum: "I don't know if this helps at all but two people, one who did write a letter and the other who didn't and was thinking about it, who may or may not be the same people that you're talking about, but I suspect they are, were also in contact with me."

Clarkson: "And me!"

Cullum: "Yeah, about whether they should write a letter and nowhere in that correspondence was there any sense in that correspondence that it was coming from anyone else but that person."

Gartlehner: "I'm still confused because that is a serious issue, it is, it would be a completely breach of your impartiality if you addressed or asked people to ..."

Burton interrupts: "If, if, if someone said to me, you know, should we or could we or may we ..."

Gartlehner: "Yes, if someone approached you it's different."

Burton: "But I've never gone out to people drumming up ideas and saying look, you should write to the board, you should write to the board about this, or put on the pressure ... These are

professional people who can make their own decisions about whether they write to the board or not. I find it very disturbing that you say that, I don't know how I can sort of defend myself in any other way, because I don't know what the issue is."

Santesso: "It's the, the, um ... it just gets back down to that person who told me they were feeling pressured and pursued."

Hammerstein: "Wow!"

Burton: "Wow. Well, I don't know who that is."

Now, something extraordinary happened. The board, which was usually very talkative, with many interruptions and people talking on top of each other, sat in silence for a full 15 seconds. Despite opposition from Burton and Koster, Santesso didn't give in but kept saying that she knew that one person had felt pressured and pursued to write a letter.

However, the psychological mechanisms, the group pressure, particularly when the leaders are against you, had started to influence her when she said to Burton: "But maybe if you can really confirm, that these other letters were not pursued, then I would be OK." Why would she accept such confirmation about other letters when she knew about a concrete case that disproved what Burton and Koster – who wasn't involved with the letters but merely parroted Burton – claimed?

Gartlehner: "What I find odd is that Cindy wrote two similar letters, addressing the same issue, and the second letter again, that she had already addressed in the first letter."

Santesso: "Yeah, but there are a lot of personal, you know ... we have the whole incident with Cindy ... Peter walked out, so I'm just wondering whether letters are something we should be using as 'information'."

Koster: "But I think at this point everyone needs to understand there was no intent to solicit letters to pressure people or do anything in that regard. If somebody took it that way, I have no idea why. Because the correspondence I've seen, and maybe I wasn't copied on every single email, but from what I've seen it was very impartial and people were told to do what was best for themselves."

I did not know that Farquhar had sent two letters, as I have only seen one. Santesso referred to the board meeting in Cape Town in September 2017 where I suggested to change our policy so that no one with financial conflicts of interest would be allowed to become author on a Cochrane review that evaluated that company's product (see Chapter 6). The board was very positive towards my proposal, but Farquhar was not. At one point, I left the room and went to the toilet to cool down a bit because she treated me very rudely when she argued why I should not be involved with my own proposal.

It was amazing that Koster continued to say that the letters were not orchestrated, as she had no first-hand knowledge of this. If it had been a court trial, such a statement would have been dismissed. But this was Cochrane, and it was a show trial. The farce went on.

Burton: "I mean, the thing about this which is, I think is sort of, I think is worrying me, is that this is an allegation about my behaviour, which hasn't resulted in a letter being sent anyway, so the only reason to raise this is to cast doubt over my integrity because..."

Santesso interrupts: "But the ..." (she tries to talk but Burton gets louder and talks over).

Burton interrupts: "Because, because, because there is no other reason why you could have possibly raised this because it hasn't resulted in a letter anyway – the only reason to raise it is to cast doubt on my integrity, I can't think of any reason to ..."

Santesso interrupts: “No, it’s about these letters, whether you should really be paying attention to letters which could be someone’s (bias) because Cindy and Peter did not get along, and if you pay attention to ...”

Burton interrupts, talks over Santesso and won’t allow her to finish her sentences.

Burton: “I, I, I, I, I am going to turn to ... I again, I think we should rely on the expertise we have in the room here and I am going to refer to Rae.”

Lamb: “Can I just say that whatever the motivation that lay behind the letters, um, and I know it’s timing and all those things, too, but I think that we have a duty as a board to take them at face value about an issue. You can’t dismiss them on the basis of whatever we think the motivation might be. It’s like saying that everyone who comes to me with a complaint has got an axe to grind, and so we still have to deal with the content of the letters. We can’t get a discussion about possible motivation and what lay behind them and someone has an axe to grind or whatever gets in the way of the actual substance of the letters.”

Burton no longer denied that he had orchestrated letters but attacked Santesso, accusing her of bringing it up to discredit him, and he tried to subvert the discussion by calling on “expertise,” as if this could get him off the hook. There wasn’t much “expertise” in Lamb’s reply. It is very disturbing that she argued that the way the letters originated, was irrelevant. Planted evidence would be dismissed in a court case.

Being desperate, Burton used two of Schopenhauer’s tactics at the same time: “If you are being worsted, you can make a diversion – that is, you can suddenly begin to talk of something else, as though it had a bearing on the matter in dispute and afforded an argument against your opponent ... it is a piece of impudence if it has nothing to do with the case, and is only brought in by way of attacking your opponent” and “Appeal to authority rather than reason.”

Santesso: “But the credibility and reliability of the ...”

Marshall interrupts: “It’s like saying everyone is a vexatious complainant, you just can’t do that, it’s not right.”

Howe: “Can I just say that you asked Martin the question. He answered you. You either accept that and move on and we all accept Martin’s answer, or you make a formal issue and bring evidence to that.”

Lamb: “Or you can go back to the person that raised the concerns. I don’t know what you said to that person, but if that person has an issue and is raising allegations in terms of some kind of conduct, then again, they follow the channel and they come to us with a complaint and then Martin has a chance to defend himself. But we can’t deal with the vague generalities.”

Howe: “I think we should move on from that and I’m happy to accept at this moment in time, Martin’s response and I think we should ...”

Burton interrupts and speaks for a very long time, confusingly and incoherently:

“So, so, so, so, so, so, so, so, I tell you what I said. You see Counsel wanted to interview me, and I wasn’t really expecting it, but he did and that was because of all the issues raised by Peter and sometimes, and I like to, I was honest with him, so the, he asked me particularly, just bear with me - there’s a reason for this story - he asked me particularly about the events at the board only time in Geneva and whether I believed that a letter had been discussed, a letter signed by co-chairs David and Peter [sic; but there were no co-chairs named David and Peter] binding him to a certain behaviour and that we were made aware of that letter, we knew its contents and then we discussed and we then released Peter of those obligations. I said, I said in the paper-

work that I have no recollection of that actually having happened. When the Counsel put it to me, I said look, you know, that's my honest thing that I have no recollection at that meeting ... but you begin to doubt your own sanity and your own memory and then if I am wrong about that, then I said I am sorry about that, I said, I actually think there are ways of checking it because there are lots of other people at the board meeting and if this is a pertinent and relevant point of view of the inquiry I'm sure you'll do that, I'm sure you'll check it. And you know, everybody else, practically in this room was there.

I believed at all times in dealing with these issues that I have tried to be as scrupulously fair as possible. I don't recognize the idea that I handed someone, I just don't recognize that at all. If that's someone's perception, then I'm incredibly surprised and I would regret that very much. Because to my knowledge and recollection, I purposely, as you might imagine, did not set out: 'If people say I'm thinking about a letter, what do you think?' You know, I'd say you can or you can't or what have you, if your views are strong, you should write something, but in the normal course of things, I have conversations but at the same time, I was scrupulous to say, it's up to people to write one. And someone clearly hasn't written one here and that was their prerogative. And if I've done anything wrong in all of that then I apologise, I do not recognize this description of what has gone on, but I am beginning to doubt my own sanity here.

As you might just a final thing to recognize something that Marguerite said earlier – if I could tell you the number of hours that this has taken, the amount of hours of energy, both personal and emotional and everything else, dealing with Peter and checking, having to check every single thing. We spent a fortune on the lawyers, I'll tell you that now, we've been in daily contact with the lawyers and because of the difficulty of dealing with him, but it's not that, my staff is supposing to be organising, they have organised the 25th anniversary symposium, one of the highlights of life and potentially of my career. And it's been completely and utterly overshadowed by these events. And as Rae said, we've spent an enormous amount of time, too much time, too much resources, and none of this honours the contribution of the other 30,000 people, the people that follow the rules, and sorry, I won't say any more than that. In fact, I'm going to hand over the chair to Marguerite and we need to finish discussing this item."

This is a crucial moment. Burton had been raving about the issues with the letters for quite some time and was now close to cracking. He suddenly changed subject and spoke about a meeting in Genève, which was a totally irrelevant diversion, and gave names of two co-chairs that did not exist. He said twice that he was beginning to doubt his own sanity and pretended he could not remember the events.

A little earlier, he tried to divert the blame from himself to Santesso. Now, he tried to blame me and arouse sympathy by saying how many hours I have cost him, playing the "pity me" card when he talked about his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary symposium. I looked up this type of behaviour on Google and found out that some people use this trick when they are about to be unmasked. By comparison, when I held my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary symposium one month later, Burton had expelled me, and I knew that I would likely lose my job. Poor Burton. You committed horrible injustice, and if it had been a court trial, you would have committed perjury, but you still wanted people to pity you.

As my expulsion was what Wilson and Burton wanted, Burton cannot blame me that it cost him some hours of work and a fortune on lawyers, which was a very poor use of charity money.

Lamb dismissed Santesso's revelations about Burton by saying they couldn't deal with vague generalities. This was immensely hypocritical. Santesso said she could prove Burton's wrong-

doing. And I was expelled based on vague generalities, the “bigger picture” and my “bad behaviour.” Some are more equal than others in Cochrane, and the inequality is vast, as in all dictatorships.

Gartlehner soberly argued that the letters should be ignored because they were not the result of a formal process and because they focused on me and left Wilson out of the picture. Meerpohl agreed, also because the letters had not been dealt with by Tovey or Wilson, which should have been the first instance for dealing with disputes before they were escalated to the board.

The first letter of complaint came from Jo Morrison, the editor who approved the Cochrane HPV vaccine review. When I responded to her complaint, on 21 August, [I wrote to Burton](#):

“You say that the complaint ... was sent to you as co-chairs of the Governing Board and that you therefore intend to share the letter with the Governing Board prior to the next board meeting. I believe this is not the correct procedure. Anyone can send a complaint to the Governing Board. This does not automatically mean that it is then also the Governing Board that should deal with it. The Governing Board deals with strategic matters, not with day-to-day matters, which this is an example of. According to the Cochrane Governance Structure Flowchart, Morrison should have submitted the complaint to Editor-in-Chief, David Tovey. I therefore copy this email to David who is the person that should deal with the complaint.”

Of course, I got nowhere. Burton was obsessed with processes and rules but made exceptions to them when they would not produce the predestined outcome. When Jefferson complained about Lasserson, he sent it to Wilson and Tovey, and Burton said at the board meeting that this was appropriate because they were his line managers! But for me, other rules applied. I felt like Boxer, the horse in *Animal Farm*, that worked itself to death because it had done so much for the pigs that didn't do productive work.

Wilson and Burton redefined the rules all the time as they pleased. Meerpohl mentioned the discussion he had with me in 2016 when I sought his advice, as I wanted to publish a disclaimer on our website, so that Wilson could no longer hunt me down (see page 21). Wilson reproached him for speaking to me, with the argument that Wilson was my line manager. However, as already noted, Wilson could not forbid one centre director to talk to another centre director.

Burton argued that since the letter writers had complained about me in my role as a trustee, Wilson could not deal with them. This remark was also blatantly false. Morrison, the first letter writer, wrote absolutely nothing about my role as a trustee. It was a discussion of the science, and she ended her letter by saying: “Please consider this a formal complaint and request appropriate redress on behalf of the review authors, GNOC [her review group] and the CEU team [Tovey's team].” Thus, Burton not only violated the rules; he also misinformed the board.

Meerpohl pointed out that one of the other letter writers was “concerned about the conduct of the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre.” Again, this was not an issue for the board, as I acted in my role as a scientist, not as a trustee.

Koster responded that trustees should be held to a higher standard, which was why these letters were sent to the co-chairs. Not only did this remark not make sense; it was wrong. Like Burton, Koster would often invent spurious excuses or violate the rules when someone backed her into a corner. She then stopped the meeting for lunch.

It is extremely likely that all the letters sent to Burton in early September had been orchestrated by him. Their content was remarkably similar; they were all about our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review; they were all sent at about the same time, more than a month after we

published our criticism on 27 July; and they were all sent to the board and not to the Editor-in-Chief, which would have been the correct thing to do. The likelihood that all of this were chance events is miniscule. Moreover, Santesso said to Burton: "I know for a fact, that you pursued someone to submit a letter."

After the board's discussion of this, the only decent action for the board would have been to drop their "process" against me and declared it a mistrial, nullifying the proceedings and also the evidence because it was flawed and planted.

But the co-chairs continued. Despite Burton's insane ravings, they were approaching their goal through exhaustion and group pressure.

During the lunch break, Hammerstein told me that Burton wanted to expel me from Cochrane so that I could no longer be a member of the board, and that he had changed tactics and would no longer base it on the Spokesperson Policy but on my "behaviour."

Meerpohl and Santesso told me that the situation was very uncertain. The board discussed the consequences of expelling me: If they unleashed the guillotine, where would the head end? The co-chairs looked for a paragraph they could use, just like in medieval times.

There were two interesting head-to-head conversations when most people were out the board room during the lunch break:

Burton: "We had contact with Peter [this was not me], and we had contact with Sophie Hill, and we had contact with Paul Garner. But, other than those people, there was somebody else?"

Santesso: "No, Paul ... (they talk over each other)."

Burton: "I've got all the emails here."

Santesso: "There was such a 'push,' and Paul was like ... and I was there at the time ... so that's what came out and I was like ... should we really ... these matters, I don't really, in general don't know about letters."

Burton: "So, so, so, let me just say, I think the issue here, I think this is one of those situations where it's better to explain it ... he phoned me."

Santesso: "But it was, you know ..."

Burton: "We had a conversation, and he was ill in bed."

Santesso: "Yes."

Burton: "And that's when he said, I didn't say one way or the other, and I didn't write him to say you should do it, you should write. He wrote me the letter, he then wrote back and said, I was ill when I wrote this letter and maybe the gracious way to think about this is that he was ill, and he was confused or felt he was being handled. I didn't even know he was in bed when I spoke to him on the phone, and I was actually ringing about something else because, um, yeah, I was ringing him ... something else came up ... just trying to ... um ... so."

Santesso: "I think Paul said he initiated it."

Burton: "He did, he did, he did ... he said, um ..."

Santesso: "And in the end just said, this is playground antics. And so, you know, in some ways it's like, we've had conversations about this, I have to be very careful about the board, this and that, and it was a weird conversation because I couldn't say much, so yeah. So, it just made me doubt what are we going to do with the letters. Because it's such a, such a ... that's why I was, like, are we going to use these letters, or shall we not use these letters?"

Burton: "I was just to try and show you."

Santesso: "No ... no, you don't have to prove anything to me."

Burton: "I mean, I mean, OK. But I was just really upset."

Santesso: "But then I was too ..." (laughs)

Burton: "I don't think we're going to agree necessarily on everything by the end of the day, but we might agree on this ... but thank you."

Santesso: "But I also want to point out ..."

Burton: "I know, I know ... so, so, so."

Santesso: "That's why I wanted to talk about this ... I thought, you know, what am I going to do."

Burton: "Yeah, you know, and the thing is, and the thing is, Paul wrote, he wrote the letter and then he wrote back and said I was ill last week, and I am now withdrawing it. And we just said fine, that's all. And exchanged emails and said, whom shall I write it to, and I said if you're going to write it you have to write it to the co-chair of the board. When he did write it, we said, just want to be clear, you really want this to ... we say it to everybody, we wrote to all these people saying, are you clear that this is to, going to go the board?"

Santesso: "Yeah."

Burton: "So, why don't we tell people we realise there has been a misunderstanding."

Santesso: "Yeah, yeah, there's no ill feelings because I actually really ... we didn't really get to finish the, you know, that's why I said, I just wanted to make sure that it was, if this is about the letters ... it's not going to be about ..."

Burton: "The thing, the thing ... the phase we're going into now, as you can imagine with everything going on, we just can't have ... we contacted the lawyers and said what's the right thing to do, what the right thing to do is, and you know they've said that you must look at the generality now, the whole thing now."

Koster entered the room and talked to Burton about her conversation at lunch with Santesso.

Koster: "I said what happened here is you impugned Martin's trustworthiness and that's why it was taken seriously. And so, I said, please go talk to him."

Burton: "Yeah, she's just not ..." (indecipherable)

Koster: "Yeah."

Burton: "So, it was Paul Garner, and Paul Garner wrote some emails to, about him, and I rang him up and it turned out when I rung him, that when he was sending emails from his work address, he was sick in bed, which was a bit of a surprise. And he said to me, can I send, you know, this ... so he was sick ... and I probably said what I said to everyone, well, if you want to send one, if you want to ... anyway, he then sent an email in. He then retracted and said, actually I don't want to send this ... I was sick when I sent this."

Koster: "I remember."

Burton: "You remember that? And so that's what she [Santesso] thought, she described it, he thought he was handled. Well, he was sick, that's why ... and I wouldn't have rung somebody if I knew they weren't at work, but he was sending me work emails so there was no handling, and I didn't think of it any more than ..." (indecipherable)

The discussions about the orchestrated letters were unfocused, confusing, contradictory, and mysterious, like "he was sending me work emails so there was no handling," which is a non-sequitur like, "the sun was shining so there was no burglary." Burton both said that he rang Garner (about "something else," which he did not specify) and that Garner rang him. Garner felt he had been handled but this was explained away by saying he was ill, although it is extremely rare that

an illness can make people that confused. More likely, Garner realised it was a bad idea to complain about me. Just after this, Burton admitted to Koster that he did not ring Garner about something else but that he rang because Garner had emailed him about me. It is not even clear how many letters that were involved, and Burton did not inform the board about this, but at least six persons seem to have been involved, which makes it extremely unlikely that the letters had not been orchestrated by Burton.

My report to Counsel was highly incriminating for Burton and Wilson, which explains why he likely engaged in such a deplorable practice immediately after I had submitted it and why he fought so hard to convince the board that they should expel me.

This is the same man as he who could not possibly have done anything wrong according to Counsel because he was an “eminent Professor.” I am glad that I am just a Professor.

### **Burton’s pathetic amateur theatre**

During the board meeting, I knocked on the door twice. Burton opened the door both times. The first time, after three hours of waiting, I asked Burton for permission to get my jacket, which was granted. I therefore did not foresee any problems when I knocked on the door again, after another one and a half hours. I wanted to tell the board that I would go back to the hotel and that it would therefore take some time before I showed up if the board needed me.

It might have been the worst possible moment that I disturbed Burton. He was very tense and aggressive, likely because he was uncertain whether the board would expel me. Without even asking why I knocked on the door, he exclaimed: “You cannot come in here!” and tried to block the door physically. Instinctively, I pushed open the door to deliver my message to the board.

Burton overdramatised this to such an extent that I can only describe it as pathetic amateur theatre aiming at depicting me as a violent person:

“Don’t push your way in, don’t push me.”

I said: “I’m sorry. I have a question. This is unacceptable. I have been out the door for four and a half hours, I am coming in here kindly, to ask you ... I am leaving and if you need me, it might take a little time. I’m not even allowed to tell you. Martin, this is totally unacceptable.”

Burton: “So, so, so ...”

I said: “And you talk about *my* behaviour? That’s really funny. OK?”

I left and closed the door.

Burton: (indecipherable) “So, he’s pushed past me but he’s actually, you know, he’s down and dirtied my shirt, and he may or may not have ... he’s actually bruised my arm here. So, he pushed past me to get in.”

Marshall: “Do we need to just have a few minutes?”

Burton: “I’m sorry, I mean, this is damage and assault here, do I go find the police or do I not? And I’m not going to do ... but you were in the room. I simply held the door partly open and said, Peter, I’m sorry, we’re still talking, and he forced his way past me.”

Marshall: “That’s what I saw.”

Burton: “Yeah, I’m fine. It’s just you know ...”

After the board had talked briefly about my criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review, Burton took up the issue again: “No, no, I’m fine, I’m fine, it’s not huge damage, but there shouldn’t be any damage at all there, should there? You should not have that. And if I don’t photograph it, Peter will deny it ever took place. I’m fine thank you.”

Koster: "Does everyone want to take a deep breath? Let's just adjourn for 5 minutes. Martin, think you need some ice on that?"

Burton: "Yeah." (indecipherable)

Burton leaves the room.

Koster: "Oh dear."

Santesso: "Did anyone speak to him in the lunch break and tell him how long this was going to take?"

Cullum: "Well, I had a brief conversation with him because he said, 'should I go back to Denmark?' and I said, 'well, look we'll try and wrap this up as quickly as we can, but we just need to end this discussion to get to the next.'"

Marshall: "This doesn't excuse any of that, but he has been sitting around for hours." (chatting and agreeing)

Burton interrupts: "Normal behaviour at that point would be to knock on the door, ask, look, I think I should leave and go back to the hotel and whatever it is ... it's not barging in and pushing on."

Lamb: "No, no, I'm just curious, we followed good enough, in terms of process but ..."

Clarkson: "Though, at the start, we did say we would call."

Lamb: "Yeah, after he came back." (to fetch my jacket)

Clarkson: "Though I agree, we should have just said, just go back to the hotel and we'll call you."

Marshall: "But the behaviour is unacceptable."

Koster: "Exactly."

Howe: "I'm just gob-smacked really that, that behaviour just happened, and he knew that we were all sitting here having a discussion and we'd all observe. To me, it smacks of that he doesn't really care what people think about him to some extent, and if he's prepared to do that here, what other things, what other behaviours has he exhibited in other meetings when he's representing Cochrane. And if he's acting like that ..."

Marshall: "That's evidence based." (laughs)

Howe: "He's got a track record of that, storming off in Cape Town and all of the things that happened, it's, it's, it's not an isolated incident, it's every single meeting, there's an outburst of some description and I can't imagine that it's isolated to these meetings here, it must happen in other meetings."

Burton interrupts: "So, so, so, say I think, I think, I agree about grave behaviour. To carry on the Me Too analogy, you know ... you've just got to call them out."

Hammerstein: "But this is criminal behaviour."

Meerpohl: "Yeah, I don't think you should compare criminal behaviour with that ..."

Marshall: "Well, assault is not, assault is ..."

Hammerstein: "Oh, come on Catherine."

Marshall: "Well, it's a technical assault."

Santesso: "But we're not talking about that actually."

Marshall: "But we could."

Santesso: "But, really?"

Koster: "Think about it. It happened at this very meeting."

Marshall: "We have all witnessed it and there's no reason why we can't call the police."

Lamb: "Who would do nothing?"

Marshall: "We don't know that."

Gartlehner: "They would laugh at us."

Santesso: "He's a big man, he probably pushed the door."

Clarkson: "I think it represents his frustrations and possibly our upsetness and concerns, but I don't think we should focus on that because it's the decision based on what is happening within the wider sphere."

Gartlehner: "Excluding him from Cochrane based on what exactly is 'bad behaviour,' is that really enough?"

Marshall: "Well, we could just call the police now and then."

What happened here is similar to what often happens in closed psychiatric wards. You push people over the edge and then use their "bad behaviour" against them.<sup>54</sup> Psychiatric patients usually react because they are exposed to forced treatment with drugs, they intensely dislike and other inhumane conditions. When they protest, e.g. about adverse effects of the drugs, they are often given higher doses or more drugs because the doctors think the adverse effects are disease symptoms.<sup>55</sup>

I had been under severe stress for several months, which disturbed my sleep. Wilson had harassed me for years and this was his golden opportunity of getting rid of me for good. Based on the documents I had seen and conversations with my supporters during the lunch break, I knew that I would not be afforded a fair and due process.

Since the board meeting had dragged on for so long, I assumed that the co-chairs were doing their worst to find excuses for expelling me, including spreading lies and other misinformation I was not allowed to defend myself against. I was therefore very frustrated when I decided to go back to the hotel after 4.5 hours of waiting without getting any feed-back from the meeting. I even considered going back to Denmark, as I had no doubt what the verdict would be.

As for bad behaviour, I consider it seriously bad behaviour that the co-chairs didn't contact me but kept me waiting and ignored me when we met outside the board room, as if I was a leper. I was still their colleague, but in their mind, I had stopped existing. I was a non-person.

Only one board member displayed any empathy for my situation. Clarkson realised that the little scene at the door represented my frustrations.

Burton said that normal behaviour would be to knock on the door, ask, and tell people I was about to leave. Burton wouldn't give me the opportunity and tried to close the door right in my face. He then used the result of his own bad behaviour to characterise me as displaying grave behaviour. He even used the Me Too analogy.

Although nothing happened, and Burton said twice that he was fine, he nonetheless spoke about damage and assault, about having the non-existing bruises photographed and calling the police, and he confirmed he needed ice when Koster asked him. This is as pathetic as it gets.

As always, Marshall was worst, "there's no reason why we can't call the police," and when she said she found my behaviour unacceptable, Koster added "Exactly," which looks innocent when written but she has a razor sharp way of saying it that cuts through walls.

---

<sup>54</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Sørensen A. [Systematic violations of patients' rights and safety: Forced medication of a cohort of 30 patients](#). *Ind J Med Ethics* 2020;Oct-Dec;5(4) NS: 312-8.

<sup>55</sup> Gøtzsche PC. *Deadly psychiatry and organised denial*. Copenhagen: People's Press; 2015.

## Allegations of sexual harassment, Me Too

Marshall's wickedness was second to none. In relation to a discussion about whether it was appropriate for Cochrane researchers to criticise the scientific work of other Cochrane researchers publicly, Marshall suddenly said:

"I guess I'm sitting here and reflecting on the Me Too movement and also people who have been fabulous entertainers who have behaved very badly to people who have, they have compromised, but they are brilliant as entertainers or film directors, has somehow meant that their bad behaviour has been overlooked and indulged. And I think that we have a very clear legal obligation to our staff and that while I am personally deeply impressed by the things that Peter has done scientifically, it does not change the fact that he has behaved in a way that I believe breaches our expectations of people around this table."

Marshall's totally unprofessional, inappropriate, irrelevant, and defamatory comment got its own life in [Burton's hate speech](#) at the Annual General Meeting four days later that made some people believe that I had sexually abused women, even though they could not reconcile this with their knowledge of me.

The defamatory insinuations were so horrible that the board sheepishly needed to state at a [webinar on 4 October](#) where they tried to explain why I had been expelled, that there were "NO allegations of sexual or physical misconduct, or any other criminal activity."

Cullum and Burton also contributed to the spreading of the malicious insinuation. When Santesso praised me for my work on mammography screening, Cullum interrupted her and said:

"Yeah, I totally hear that, but that totally goes to Catherine's Me Too statement before, just because all these actors or whatever have all done amazing work it doesn't mean to say that you can disregard everything else."

As usual, Marshall immediately joined the whipping team: "There are standards of professional behaviour that we should expect and not excuse."

When Burton lied and said that, according to Cochrane's lawyer, there was no doubt about my "grave behaviour," he added, just after these two words: "To carry on the Me Too analogy, you know, Kevin Spacy was a great actor he did wonderful work, you know, this is about ... not about the good things ... lots of people who do bad things, do lots of good things as well. Sometimes there's sufficient bad stuff there, you've just got to call them out."

This is significant because Burton used the same wording about calling people out in his hate speech about me.

Marshall: "I was going to say from the Me Too movement all sorts of things have changed, and different people have tried to take stands where their voices have been unheard before. I mean, I think to stand up to bullies and people who intimidate is always the right thing to do. No matter how much genius they have."

Marshall also spoke a lot about my bullying of people although I have never bullied anyone. This came close to accusing me of sexual harassment of women without saying it directly. To bring Me Too into the picture was deliberately designed to impugn my character. It was an attempt at character assassination, and it was deceptive because it tried to prove guilt by association. This way, it became part of the board's false narrative. What was perhaps most remarkable is that not a single board member tried to stop Marshall.

When Faba asked why the board should decide what happened in a Cochrane centre, as the centres were independent, Burton responded by talking about sexual misconduct again, saying

that in one of the overseas countries, some form of sexual impropriety and financial misdealing happened for Oxfam, a UK based charity, and that there were questions in parliament. Therefore, Cochrane needed to know when centres organised events or did other things.

Gartlehner noted that, "The difference with Oxfam is that there was criminal behaviour that was all over the media."

The people at the board who stabbed me in the back were Burton, Koster, Marshall, Howe, Ray, and Cullum. It says a lot about Cochrane's moral collapse that Marshall and Howe are the two co-chairs of the board today. In the morning, both at the hotel and before the board meeting started, Marshall was extremely friendly with me, talking about sailing, windmills, and landscapes in New Zealand where she was from and asking me what I had seen when I was there to lecture six months earlier. I got the impression that she was my supporter, but she proved to be the most wicked, two-faced person in the board room. I do not understand such people.

Burton and Koster were also evil, but they did not try to hide it. I have not been able to find an authentic photo of Koster, only a photoshopped one that depicts her as a kind person, many years younger than she was:



Marguerite Koster



Nicky Cullum

### **How can we kick him out and what are the consequences?**

The recordings show that many members of the board were in great doubt about what to do and what the consequences would be. Burton, however, thought that everything could be managed by proper PR, even the unjustified expulsion of one of the most well-known persons in Cochrane and one of its greatest contributors. His hubris showed his huge disrespect for other people, as if they cannot think for themselves. It also showed a disrespect for those four board members who, over and over, warned about the unpredictable and potentially very serious consequences of expelling me. These board members resigned in protest over my expulsion.

I think Burton wanted revenge because I had documented his mismanagement of the charity, and, more importantly, that he did not dare report back to his master that he had not ensured the preplanned outcome. Five hours into the board meeting, in all his eagerness to discredit me, Burton suddenly said, "What do we really think Mark is going to say?"

Wilson was behind the show trial and dictated its outcome, and Burton was his loyal servant. After the teleconference on 13 June that I was not allowed to attend, some of the board members told me that Wilson had threatened the board and had talked about a huge financial compensation because he had been "harassed" by a board member - one of his employers (me).

Apparently, he also gave them an ultimatum and said that it was a choice between him and me. How is it possible that one part in a dispute is allowed to be present and make threats while the other part is not allowed to appear?

Wilson's childish and tyrannical behaviour did not exactly conceal his ultimatum of getting my head on a platter. Moreover, on 5 September, a week before the board meeting, Wilson's IT staff working alongside us at the Nordic Cochrane Centre had a conference call with Wilson, Tovey and Soares-Weiser where Wilson said that action would be taken in Edinburgh because I had criticised the HPV vaccine review. He said it was serious and unprecedented that we had published our criticism in a competing journal, which was not correct. This had happened many times before, and we did it ourselves when we criticised the Cochrane ADHD review in 2017, which was subsequently withdrawn.<sup>56</sup> The fact that Wilson knew beforehand that action would be taken means that he had staged my expulsion and controlled the board. This was very scary.

Gartlehner: "I think we need ... to see the consequences beyond Peter, the consequences for the Cochrane Collaboration. The message that we send to the people out there, it's larger than Peter."

Burton explained that lawyers "are experts in reputation management, they know about our reputation, they know about Peter ... we could be guided by them ... So clearly there is an issue of communication and action ... If we just kick him off the board he will carry on, doing all the things he's done, he will persecute Mark and David and ... perhaps persecute is the wrong word, I withdraw that word. He will do things that will occupy hours of their time, and the co-chairs' time and everybody else's time."

Clarkson: "I can't articulate how sad this makes me feel ... I'm not sure how much Peter is aware of the huge sense of respect and regard people do have for his work and what he has achieved and where Cochrane is, in part because of him."

Santesso: "So, if we say that he is no longer a member of Cochrane, which seems so odd to me, given that Cochrane is supposed to be open to everybody, and now we have membership, so, to actually say that he is no longer a member, is really going to affect what we deal with. I just don't think that is the solution."

Meerpohl: "No."

Burton interrupts: "It is, it is, it is in fact, with respect, because he can write or publish with the University of Copenhagen funded by the Danish Ministry of Health, that their organisation will allow him to do it ..."

Santesso interrupts: "But it's not that he, we don't even know that he did a bad thing with the Spokesperson Policy! The Counsel said that it was clear [that I did not break this policy], so in some ways if we're getting rid of him because he is violating the Spokesperson Policy ..."

Burton interrupts again: "Let's, let's, let's be clear, we're not getting rid of him because of a single or even two or three violations, we're getting rid of him for a whole series of things that we have wrapped up together, which is what the Counsel, the lawyers, said we should look at, we should look at the whole behaviour and everything ... Is there a problem here that can't be remedied? Well, I would argue that there is a definite problem that can't be remedied. Is Peter's behaviour 'outrageous and wrong?' They weren't my words; they are the words that the lawyer

---

<sup>56</sup> Boesen K, Saiz LC, Erviti J, Storebø OJ, Gluud C, Gøtzsche PC, Jørgensen KJ. The Cochrane Collaboration withdraws a review on methylphenidate for adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Evid Based Med* 2017;22:143-7.

came up with after having read it. And I would absolutely argue that it is outrageous and wrong ... he needs to leave the collaboration and have his membership taken away."

Cullum: "He's made massive accusations against senior members of the collaboration, really, like tampering with evidence ... those sorts of accusations are not fitting for a board member, and I don't think any of these problems will go away."

Howe: "I'm just concerned about how much time we have devoted to Peter. Not just at this meeting but at previous meetings and trying to cajole and all the time and effort that's gone into trying to make Peter happy."

Meerpohl: "I'm struggling to blame all the time we've spent on many of these issues over these meetings on Peter only ... he is the one that tested the boundaries of the Spokesperson Policy repeatedly ... He is just flagging it ... I think the reputational damage of us excluding anyone based on bad behaviour, someone who has been outspoken and critical of Cochrane is probably uncontrollable ... I think the time that you guys will spend on managing Peter once you kick him out will be way more than managing him while he is in the collaboration."

Burton got it wrong again. The only use of the word "outrageous" in Counsel's report was by Wilson, in relation to the email I sent to the board on 11 April. There was absolutely nothing wrong with my email, and Counsel did not find any problems with it.

The only time Counsel thought I might have done anything wrong, "I respectfully think," it was he who was wrong because he had not understood what centres are allowed to do. But Burton lied again. He indicated I was guilty of many violations. This was not true, and it was not true that Counsel supported his view.

Trustees are obliged to point out if there is mismanagement in a charity, which I did, and I later complained to the Charity Commission, which trustees are obliged to do when the issues are serious. Cullum indicated that a board member should never criticise the CEO, which is wrong and highly likely to harm the charity.

On 9 October 2018, [I asked the Charity Commission to open a statutory inquiry](#). I reviewed the major problems:

- tampering with evidence
- serious mismanagement
- numerous violations of rules for charities and for Cochrane
- lack of a collaborative, democratic, transparent, and accountable leadership
- management by fear and bullying
- an almost total lack of due processes, in stark contrast to other organisations
- fierce resistance from the CEO towards introducing due processes
- favouritism (other rules apply to CEO staff than to Cochrane collaborators)
- serious flaws and conflicts of interest in the process against me
- scientific censorship although Cochrane is a scientific organisation
- repeated, very harmful actions by Cochrane's CEO favouring industry and guild interests
- scientific misconduct in terms of false authorship.

I explained that what I had described in my complaint had broad implications. The scientific integrity of Cochrane was undermined, which would impact people broadly across the world. Cochrane reviews are the most important resource we have for setting policies in healthcare, for writing clinical guidelines, and for treating patients. If people lose their confidence in Cochrane

reviews, they are likely to find less reliable information on the Internet and to be subjected to more harm and less benefit than what would otherwise have been the case.

I noted that Cochrane was imploding, and that the situation would not remedy unless the current leadership was replaced, and that it would be a major disaster for public health if the Charity Commission did not act swiftly.

Six weeks later, I was told that “there may be issues for the Commission to further assess.” Unfortunately, the commission is understaffed and decides itself which cases it will take up. I have complained twice why I did not hear from the Commission but got no reply. I will therefore now complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Burton and Howe continued to blame me for the time the board had spent on me, although the blame should be put on Cochrane’s CEO, which Meerpohl tried to say. Gartlehner supported Meerpohl and mentioned a letter from senior Cochrane people asking that the Cochrane HPV vaccine review be retracted. He talked about setting a precedent and asked if these people would be expelled because they spoke out against Cochrane.

Burton derailed the discussion: “Let’s just jump these when they come to us. We’re dealing with what’s in front of us.”

Gartlehner: “But this is a precedent. This is more than Peter.”

One would have expected, especially for an organisation like Cochrane whose job it is to systematically assemble the evidence and scrutinize it carefully for flaws, that the board would have carefully gone through the lawyer’s report and other evidence to come to a conclusion about the issues raised.

Nothing of the sort happened. The evidence had no importance whatsoever. Most of it was not even discussed, and the bits that were discussed were consistently misrepresented, not only by the co-chairs and my adversaries, but even by my supporters who had not had time to read the material.

The board used an enormous amount of time on repeating the same falsehoods, searching for excuses to expel me. The co-chairs increased their exaggerations and falsehoods by the end of the day to win people over to their cause. That must have been very difficult for them, as the final vote was just six to five. I have summarised the arguments in the following.

The co-chairs first focused on terminating my board membership. This wasn’t easy. As I had been democratically elected, they could only ask me to resign, not force me to, unless this was accepted as a motion at the Annual General Meeting.

A smarter way of kicking me out was to declare that I had breached Cochrane’s Articles of Association, 5.2.1, which is about being “guilty of conduct which has had or is likely to have a serious adverse effect on the charity or bring the charity or any or all of the members or directors into disrepute,” or 5.2.2, which is when one “has acted or has threatened to act in a manner which is contrary to the interests of the charity as a whole.”

These clauses are sufficiently elastic to be used to expel anyone the leadership doesn’t like. The problem with this was that [Counsel had not concluded that I had brought Cochrane into disrepute](#), and I documented [in my report](#) that I had contributed substantially to the good reputation Cochrane has.

Burton argued that, “if we actually say,” I was guilty of having breached 5.2.1, the board could take my membership away, and then I would lose my place on the board because I was an elected member. Furthermore, I could no longer be the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre. It was not about proving that I had breached any rules, but merely saying that I had.

Meerpohl seriously challenged Burton. He did not accept his vague argument about “the overall picture” but called for assessing the facts and being concrete about “where he breached whatever policy we have.” Meerpohl was not convinced that, based on Counsel’s report, they were in a good position to defend that they were now expelling me from the board.

Burton interrupted: “So, so, so, can we delay this discussion?”

Meerpohl: “Yes, absolutely, I just wanted to clarify.”

Burton derailed this crucially important discussion when he sensed he was losing the debate. Burton also used the trick about coming back to the really important issues later, which never happened. Meerpohl might have been exhausted when he caved in to this manipulation and said he just wanted to clarify.

As a flower in a lava desert, there was a tiny intermezzo among all the defamation where the co-chairs considered an alternative exit where I could leave with dignity. Burton said that I had a very senior reputation and suggested that I might agree to retire from the board and centre, “write the sort of letter that a Cabinet Minister writes when he resigns saying that, thank you very much, I’ve really enjoyed working with you ... We write a reply that says Peter, we’re grateful for everything you’ve done over the last 25 years. You have great achievements, thank you very much for this.”

Burton explained that he would be very happy with that, and Koster said I would then retire as a senior statesman and my accomplishments would be celebrated.

Hammerstein felt it wouldn’t make that much difference because the scientific community, the *BMJ*, etc., would write about what had happened.

It was a grave mistake that the board never consulted me. Facing the alternative - being kicked out of Cochrane, likely losing my job, and leaving my life’s work - I would have been highly motivated for finding other solutions. Hammerstein drew the board’s attention to Counsel’s report, in which he mentioned arbitration: “I am really surprised that you used the words of the lawyers and the Counsel about these drastic measures when there’s nothing close to those drastic measures mentioned by the Counsel.”

Burton replied that Counsel had said in his report that this would be disproportionate and extremely costly, and therefore not wise. [Counsel wrote](#): “a more formalised quasi-dispute resolution process could be very expensive indeed, which could raise questions about the proper use of charitable funds.”

This reasoning was totally flawed. Burton talked all the time about following the advice of the lawyers, which he only did when it pleased him. Counsel did not suggest any drastic measures but to make the various policies and agreements clearer, to avoid disputes in future.

Counsel felt that I should not be disciplined because of the ambiguities. And what is expensive - both in monetary terms and in lost reputation - it to skip mediation and escalate a conflict. Burton did not even know whether Cochrane would lose all the funding from the Danish Government to the centre and the three review groups based in Denmark by expelling me. Further, he stated that, “we spent a fortune on the lawyers.” Thus, if his concerns had been cost and fairness, he would have chosen mediation.

Around 2 p.m., Burton and Koster discussed the situation:

Burton: “Maybe we’ll have a majority, we’ll have a majority, we probably do. There will be a lot of hyperbole from David in terms of consequences, but I don’t think people like that really ... if we do require him to leave the board ... what is going to change? And the answer is nothing.”

Koster: "That's more work for us, going over every single dispute."

Burton: "Yeah, I know, I'm not going to do that, it's just too unpleasant and it's just not ..."

Koster: "When I accepted the job as co-chair, I did not expect this."

Burton: "I did not expect this either, so I think we might ... ask Rae or Nicky ... we should pursue it to the end now."

This is an astounding revelation. Imagine a court case where the judges are too lazy to study the evidence put in front of them and ask others to do the work. It took me a very long time to prepare my report to Counsel, and even though I did not expect fairness, I thought that my careful rebuttal of the complaints raised over the last 15 years would exonerate me. I could not imagine that the board members wouldn't read my report, or, in case anyone read it, would ignore it completely. None of the board members mentioned any of my crucial arguments during the board meeting. Not one.

After a late lunch, the finale was approaching. Burton explained that the board was allowed to, in fact encouraged to, look at a broad range of behaviours and decide if they were "outrageous or wrong or whatever words you want to cover it;" if they believed I could not accept clear instructions; if they felt I could not adhere to the Collaboration Agreement; and if they regarded my attacks on the CEO or on board members as unwarranted.

Just to be sure, Burton added that my actions need not have had a serious adverse effect; simply the likelihood that they might have had that would be sufficient.

With such criteria, anyone could be found guilty. That's like saying that driving is a criminal offence because you might run over someone. Later, I joked that the only difference to the Stalinist show trials was that I was not taken down in the cellar of the Lubjanka prison and shot in the back of the head.

Burton: "The board requires Peter Götzsche to resign from the board, on the basis that he has breached the code of conduct of trustees."

Meerpohl: "Can we be more specific?"

Burton: "We don't need to be more specific."

Meerpohl: "No, no, just to be clear for us, not necessarily the message to the outside."

Burton: "I mean, there's all the behavioural issues about respect and everything else, let alone the issues about the actual publication of the article."

Lamb: "Just wondering whether it needs a few words to make it clear that it is an issue about the 'whole' rather than just about the review from the Counsel or the HPV article, it's actually around ... all of the matters that we've been considering or something."

Burton: "[Hammerstein] said he thought people would blame it on the HPV review. We have the option to say that we ... that there were a series of other events that were conducted into a review by Counsel and that it is absolutely not just the HPV review."

Gartlehner: "We need to name ... the events, otherwise this gets out of hand."

Burton: "This is not, this is, this is, I think we can take the advice of the lawyers on what we particularly ..."

Gartlehner: "Yes, but the lawyers will not manage the Cochrane discussion."

Hammerstein: "They will have no idea. Zero."

Marshall: "Can we go to the code of conduct? Because the code of conduct gives us some wording ..."

Burton interrupts: "But, but the Articles have given us wording. We, when we get to that, the board requires Peter to resign as trustee of the Governing Board, because of several, well, because he has breached the code of conduct of trustees."

Santesso: "So, is this the statement going out to, in public, open meeting minutes or something, I mean, if we're going to ask Peter, could you please resign ..."

Burton: "This, this, this, is the motion that will be recorded in what are our confidential minutes that we keep for the 'board only' restricted time, and I can only imagine is, if the Charity Commission or anybody else asks to see them, they're not going to be public. The message that goes out is that he ... um, well, we can quote it if you want ..."

Koster: "That he breached the code of conduct."

Burton: "I will say, Rae, you're the expert here, in general, the lawyers counselled us that 'less is more.' The point is, he's broken the Spokesperson ... um, he's broken the code of conduct for trustees, full stop, and I don't feel we need to say any more than that, personally."

Santesso: "And it's based on that he is ruining our reputation?"

Lamb: "That's all within, that's all within the code, yeah, that's what Catherine's got and she's looking at the wording from that but I'm not sure."

Santesso: "So, when speaking or writing as a board member, ensure that comments might reflect current policy even though they might be at variance with personal views?"

Howe: "Respecting the authority of the co-chairs of the board or chairs of the meeting?"

Koster: "He has made, um, you know, defamatory comments about the CEO, about the board members, I mean there's a litany of different things here as well."

Santesso: "So what, is that the policy?"

Burton: "So, so, so, so, can I just, just, just, just ..."

Koster: "We don't have to put that on there."

Santesso: "Just because you don't like his behaviour, or whatever, you know, we all think about different things, we need to be clear when we say it to him, it was because of this and that."

Lamb: "Catherine, we can't have the Spokesperson Policy ..."

Burton: "It just ..."

Lamb: "It's just getting problematic."

Burton: "You just have to say that he breached the code of conduct of the trustees."

Cullum: "I think the problem here though is that people aren't sure that that's ... there are people here, I'm guessing, that aren't sure that that is the case."

Santesso: "Yeah."

Meerpohl: "Yes."

Burton: "You don't think he just breached the code of conduct of trustees?"

Santesso: "It just says, it just says the policy ... but what does it actually say?"

Howe: "That there are things that must promote leadership by example, adhere to charitable practice, avoid dominating contributions of others."

Santesso: "Should it be ... I've just thought of this now, that it says code of conduct while he was a board member, because he was elected to the board, given what he did in the past, so the Cochrane Collaboration thought that whatever he did in the past was still OK, and that his reputation was still good."

Hammerstein: "He was the highest, apparently the highest voted member ..."

Santesso: "So, shouldn't it have to be what he did during the time that he was here?"

If you believe in justice, and even if you don't, it is frightening that, after five hours of deliberations, the board still had no clear idea about why I should be expelled or whether I had broken any rules. The honest people on the board were confused, which is characteristic for a show trial.

It is understandable that Burton didn't want to be specific. Moreover, even if there *had* been concrete reasons, they would be kept secret. This violates fundamental Cochrane principles about transparency, openness, and accountability, and considering how grave the consequences would be - for me, my family, my PhD students, other close collaborators, and for Cochrane itself - it is remarkable that the process wasn't stopped.

As predicted by Gartlehner, things got out of hand, but Burton wouldn't listen, not even when two board members told him that lawyers are not useful for discussions of Cochrane issues.

It was again confirmed that our criticism of the HPV vaccine review played a key role.

Koster characterised my comments about the CEO and co-chairs as defamatory. As they were factual, they cannot be defamatory, and it was wrong to give them any importance for my expulsion. They were for internal use, and it was my duty as a board member to raise issues about mismanagement of a charity. That the board gave the CEO immunity, is in itself mismanagement.

Meerpohl paid lip service to the prevailing sentiment at the board when he said that I had behaved unprofessionally and probably breached the code of conduct, but he also drew the board's attention to, "how much we've been pushing that man in the last couple of years. I mean, if you push me that far, I'd lose my temper. Sorry. Mark lost his temper the other time and the Counsel excuses that. He grabbed me on the shoulder, I probably had a kind of haematoma, he shouted at me ..."

Hammerstein exclaimed: "Assault, assault," making a mockery of Marshall's ludicrous claim that I had assaulted Burton and of her suggestion that they should call the police.

Meerpohl: "He assaulted me, he called Peter a liar and we're excusing that! I have sympathy for that because it was a very intense situation, I can get along with Mark well, he apologised and it's fine. But I think that we need to keep everything in perspective, we are pushing Peter for years, oh!" (exasperated)

Koster: "Let's put a motion."

Marshall: "So, ah, the board requires that Peter resigns as trustee because he has breached the code of conduct, or the board finds that Peter has breached the code of conduct and requires him to resign as a trustee immediately?"

Meerpohl: "I think there are two issues. I am happy to state that Peter breached the code of conduct. But I think the consequence is a separate decision. There could be consequences, just giving him a warning."

Hammerstein: "I agree."

Gartlehner: "I agree."

Faba: "Yes."

Meerpohl pointed out that people are not equal in Cochrane; that I had been bullied by Cochrane's CEO for years; and that he himself would have lost his temper if he had experienced this.

I did not lose my temper. The CEO did, and yet his outburst was glossed over by the board as if it never happened, and Counsel called it an "isolated incident," which it wasn't.

That Wilson apologised to Meerpohl in Lisboa in March 2018 was also not the whole truth. The hours went by, and Wilson did not contact Meerpohl to make an apology. The victim looked the perpetrator up. I was in the hotel lobby nearby when they spoke, and Wilson saw me. But he did not come up to me to apologise. He just passed by me as if I was a non-person, and he made sure six months later that I disappeared.

Marshall: "The Board finds that Peter has breached the trustee code of conduct?"

Koster: "A show of hands?"

Burton: "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. Against?"

Koster: "And David?"

Hammerstein: "I won't vote."

Koster: "OK, abstain. The second statement?"

Marshall: "The board requires Peter to resign as a trustee immediately?"

Santesso: "We need to discuss this more."

Lamb: "Does it need to be immediately, because if it's untenable for the board that he should resign, to then have him sitting on the board, making decisions ..."

Burton: "It's untenable. It has to be, we cannot have asked him to resign and then have him sitting in on meetings, it has to be immediately."

Koster: "Catherine, you want to read the sentence statement?"

Marshall: "The board requires Peter to resign as a trustee immediately."

Santesso: "Do we have an alternative? Is the only option 'immediately' right now?"

Burton: "Yes."

Clarkson: "I suppose, how do you have the conversation, 'we want you to resign,' then question it, the only conversation would be, you've breached the code of conduct, and, or anticipate he will resign, I don't know, I'm not quite sure what ..."

Santesso: "It will be quicker to move forward and to have meetings ... could you consider resigning ... a mature conversation with him about ..."

Howe: "Could we just vote on that and if ... there is not a majority for the first thing, then we see what options are available to us ..."

Burton: "OK."

Marshall: "The board requires Peter to resign as a trustee immediately?"

Koster: "A show of hands?"

Marshall: "Is that 7?"

Koster: "5, 6, 7, yep. Against?"

Burton: "Are you abstaining?"

Fava: "Abstain."

Koster: "And Jan?"

Clarkson: "I did, as apart of 7."

Burton then went for terminating my membership of Cochrane using Article 5.2.1 and to a lesser extent 5.2.2 because then I would be kicked out of the board immediately, without bothering about the lack of democracy:

"We were told by the lawyers ... that we can look at ... the totality of what's been happening over a period of time. We don't actually have to show that there has actually been a serious adverse effect, just that there is likely to be. But I would argue that there has been, he certainly brought, sought to bring, some members and some directors, by directors here it means board

members, in disrepute ... I certainly feel personally, he has tried to bring me into disrepute, but I don't want to make this, this is not just about me at all."

Marshall: "Well, and Cindy, the letter."

Burton: "And Cindy and Lisa and Mark, and for me this is all about now ... all about the big picture ... I think, Peter's sort of had his chances to try and change ... he's going to carry on, so, I, I, I, I, support the notion that we take his membership away, as well."

Gartlehner: "I am totally opposed to it. It would be too heavy handed. It would send a terrible, terrible signal to everyone else out there ... There are many personal things that have been going on, and many frustrations."

Meerpohl: "I think it is disproportionate really, but also, in terms of the overall damage."

Howe: "We're making a decision about an individual, we're not making a decision about the centre."

Hammerstein: "It would have the same effect."

Howe: "The issue is really about an individual and an individual's behaviour."

Santesso: "No, that's very wrong. In Cochrane, it is not about that."

Gartlehner: "No, it is more than that."

Lamb: "I'm not really clear on what are the implications for a Cochrane centre if the individual, who happens to be the director, loses their membership, what are the implications for the other people in that centre?"

The vagueness and false accusations continued. Burton said that I brought, then that I sought to bring, which is a very elastic concept, some people into disrepute including himself, Farquhar and Bero, two previous co-chairs. [This was not true](#).

The amount of destruction caused to other people and to Cochrane itself seemed to have no importance whatsoever for Burton and Koster. Of course not. History is full of narcissistic leaders that have not cared the slightest bit about the amount of destruction they caused. Burton was not even moved when Meerpohl and Santesso explained that jobs would be at risk because the funding of the centres in France, Germany and Canada were linked to the Centre Director, nor when Meerpohl said that the board didn't care if the Nordic Cochrane Centre disappeared. Santesso added that the Danish government probably gave me lots of money because of who I was.

Burton's inner perpetuum mobile continued talking about my "behaviour," without specifying what was wrong with it. Marshall said, "The HPV stuff," which Burton repeated, adding, "if he can't accept fair instructions, there is only one outcome." Capital punishment, as Gartlehner called it.

Burton talked about abiding by rules and policies and claimed that, "There's more than enough evidence" that I hadn't done that. What evidence? According to Counsel, there was none! Total Kafka.

Cullum: "There's clearly a major toll on the health and wellbeing of the senior managers of the collaboration ... One of the consequences of not acting quite forcefully in this situation is that we retain Peter in the collaboration, but we lose the senior central editorial unit team, the Editor-in-Chief and/ or Chief Exec, or co-chairs because we have not supported them in what has been a very, very difficult situation, under what has been very grave personal accusations from Peter. I wonder if, do you have any sense that there may be any potential resignations at the top?"

Burton: "David [Tovey] has just resigned, and he will leave the organisation on 31 March."

Santesso: "Are you saying that he's leaving because of Peter?"

Burton: "No, well, he's leaving for a variety of reasons ... he does feel a degree of being ground down by all of this stuff."

Koster: "Relentless, personal attack."

Burton: "Relentless to the point, he's had personal attack and abuse. It's not just from Peter ... I wanted to signal with Marguerite we should have a 'zero tolerance' policy in this organisation for bad behaviour."

Marshall: "And bullying and hectoring."

Burton: "To (accuse) the Editor-in-Chief or the CEO, particularly when there is no foundation for it ... Doing nothing here will be perceived ..."

Koster: "As not protecting ..."

Burton: "You, you, you, you should be, the suggestion there was overreaction here, this is not overreaction, this is deadly serious, it really is."

Marshall: "Well as part of our fiduciary duties we need to be responsible on this board and if the board made a choice that, um, to keep someone here who was placing senior staff and other senior editors in jeopardy, then I would walk away from that, because I would not want to be part of an organisation that wouldn't stand up to bullies and would endorse an unsafe environment."

Burton: "You can ask David tomorrow, you might get one answer if you ask him public questions in the public board meeting, and you might get another answer if you ask him in private, but he does not want to see, absolutely does not want to see his leaving as being tied to the HPV business ..."

Meerpohl: "I think it's really important to consider the impact on resignation of CET [Central Executive Team] staff, if we act or we don't act, but I also think we have to consider potential impact in terms of resignation if we kick Peter out of the collaboration and I would bet that some people will resign from senior positions ... it might be easier to hire some paid staff, than to find someone to lead a centre, and bring his own money to run a centre in a country."

Marshall: "I don't understand that."

Meerpohl: "Well some senior centre directors might just resign and take their funding to do other stuff."

The unfounded allegations against me and insinuations that I was the cause of virtually all problems in Cochrane escalated. It was almost like every speaker wanting to be even more wicked than the previous one. The two co-chairs made it look like Tovey leaving because of me. Not so. He expressed a desire to leave already on 31 December 2017. I had not attacked Tovey, or abused him, or bullied him, as Marshall claimed with her habitual wickedness. I always got along very well with Tovey and there was mutual respect. The only thing I can possibly be criticised for is the comment I made in *BMJ* in 2015 related to the Maudsley debate (see page 78).

Burton argued that there should be zero tolerance for bad behaviour and Marshall that no one should stand up for bullies. But they did not see the obvious. If the board had truly believed in this, they should have sacked Wilson long ago. He was the one who bullied people and scared them, but the board did everything they could to protect him and make him as comfortable as possible. The recordings show that he had a status as untouchable. The board failed miserably in its responsibility to govern the CEO. It was captured by him. Zero tolerance for bad behaviour also means that Burton and Koster should have been kicked out of the board in disgrace.

Marshall even had the audacity to suggest that I should send a letter of apology to Wilson. The victim of six years of harassment should apologise to the bully? What world is that?

Meerpohl warned the board again, in no uncertain terms, but to no avail.

Burton: "Many young people and young researchers look at Cochrane and actually don't like what they see because of the current state of play. And actually, people are not joining this organisation, so ..."

Santesso interrupts: "But if we want to get into those sorts of conversations, many people are not wanting to participate in Cochrane and are disappointed in Cochrane because of the direction of Cochrane, not because of Peter Gøtzsche ... People are not joining Cochrane for other reasons; it's not because of Peter Gøtzsche."

Burton: "I didn't say it was because of Peter Gøtzsche ... sometimes things happen in organisations, and sometimes you lose people, and you gain people ... all we can focus on is doing the right thing."

Marshall: "What will Jo Morrison [the editor who approved the Cochrane HPV vaccine review] think if we do nothing?"

Gartlehner: "You can't have a thin skin. It's just the name of the game, it's just how it is. Of course, it was hurtful for her, but we have to move beyond these, should not drive our decisions ... I think excluding Peter will be detrimental to the organisation. It will be a huge mistake and, um, it can have terrible consequences on so many levels."

Burton interrupts: "Failing to remove Peter from Cochrane, you know, he is a serial disruptor, failing to remove him will have very serious consequences as well. The issue is, can he change, has he behaved in an appropriate way?"

Burton used the familiar tactic: Raise your voice if your argument is weak: "serial disruptor" with "very serious consequences" if I am not removed.

Meerpohl: "I have an understanding of what the consequences are of keeping Peter within the collaboration because we've been doing that for 25 years. On the other decision, I don't know the consequences, not at all."

Clarkson: "Saying to somebody 'you're not a member,' I've never been involved in an organisation where that is an action." She added that a reasoned and rational discussion going forward was unlikely. Wise words. After more than five hours, Howe wanted to "sort out" the Spokes-person Policy, although Counsel had exonerated me. What a mess.

Koster said that I represented "the old regime" where "anyone should be free to express their opinions in any possible way" and that I would become "a dinosaur" fighting against any change and in need of a babysitter.

Cullum: "He is clearly in breach of the Articles of Association ... we would be a weird organisation if we just let that ride because we were frightened of the consequences of not acting. So, I think we have to act as if he is in breach."

Cullum's statement was characteristic for the absurdity of it all. First, I breached the Articles of Association, next, perhaps not, but then "we have to act as if he is in breach."

Koster gave a highly misleading account of my meeting with her and Marshall during the Cochrane Colloquium in Seoul in October 2016. She said that I felt "there was a big conspiracy" against me to push me out and that, "We spent hours with him talking him down." The truth is that I had asked Koster and Marshall for a meeting because Wilson had threatened to close my centre on several occasions. The meeting lasted only one hour, and they were pleased with it and with my plan of running for the board, which they had suggested. I was very concrete and pointed

out that Wilson was behaving unfairly to me and clearly wanted to oust me, just like he hunted down other influential people in Cochrane that had played a major role in making Cochrane a success. One man's bad behaviour cannot be a "conspiracy."

Koster told the board that she really felt we had a good conversation; that things were going great; and that, "I have always been optimistic about Peter, because he's a brilliant man ..."

Why must I be ousted if I was - in present tense - a brilliant man?

In an email from 20 February 2017, six months after Seoul, Koster wrote to me: "Just a quick note to congratulate you on your election to the Cochrane Governing Board! I'm so pleased that you decided to run for the board, especially after our discussion in Seoul. I think we will have a very effective board with a diversity of knowledge and experience ... I hope we have an opportunity to have a beer and chat."

While I have not changed, Koster was a totally different person in 2018. She told the board that she "felt on some levels personally betrayed" and absolutely beside herself because I had publicly humiliated others (when I criticised the Cochrane HPV vaccine review). "Since I was appointed (she became member of the board in 2016), I've done nothing but have to deal with Peter. And it has consumed days and weeks ... to the detriment of my own job. If that is required ... we aren't going to find anyone who wants to do these kinds of things and this organisation is going to be run by 'serial disruptors' who do so in a way that is very objectionable and disrespectful and potentially defamatory."

Marshall, the chief whip added: "Bullying."

What an irony. Cochrane was already being run by a serial disruptor: Wilson. His flair for destructing what others had patiently built up over two decades, was second to none.

I couldn't possibly have taken weeks of Koster's time. And it was the board that had behaved in a disrespectful and defamatory way, not me. I had never bullied anyone; had never been confronted with such an allegation; and there was no record of bullying. Marshall continued to make baseless allegations, the only purpose of which was defamation and character assassination.

Close to the end, Hammerstein hit the nail again. Cochrane leaders had told him that it was about the money, not about getting the science right: "What the Nordic Cochrane Centre does bothers a lot of very powerful people."

Koster ignored this of course and changed subject by bringing voting to the table again.

Marshall: "I was just trying to find some words for putting a vote ... do we as a Governing Board believe that Peter's recent actions have brought the charity into disrepute?"

Burton: "Just so, we don't need to do that ... we simply vote, we just say having considered Article 5.2.1 it is the reasonable opinion of the board that Peter is guilty of conduct and just repeat the words and give him notice ... I'd like to think it's possible that the, that the Nordic Cochrane Centre will continue ... who is Peter responsible to?"

Santesso: "Karsten is the deputy? I mean, is there a way that you know, Karsten can become the director ..."

Hammerstein: "Impossible, impossible."

Marshall: "Maybe acting director."

Hammerstein: "Impossible, he won't."

Meerpohl: "There are two things. One is whether a person would be fit to take over and then there's the funding. And that might be tied to a person."

Even though my centre was the biggest in the world, it still didn't bother the co-chairs that they didn't know if the funding for my centre and the three review groups and the Copenhagen Trial

Unit would disappear if they expelled me, or whether around 50 people might lose their jobs because of this.

Meerpohl said that my centre was one of the best funded centres and one of the few with permanent funding, to which Hammerstein remarked with sarcasm: “Good riddance then, according to some people, fewer bothersome studies!”

Cullum said that there had been major failings with the Cochrane review groups in Denmark that I hadn’t managed, but Hammerstein noted that it was not my responsibility to manage the groups, and Meerpohl seconded him.

Burton noted that he visited me with Soares-Weiser in Copenhagen and that I was very generous with my time. This was in June 2018, three months before I was expelled. He also said that “it was absolutely clear” that I had some control over the funding for the groups based in Copenhagen and had a leadership role in terms of overseeing them.

This was not correct. I had no leadership role and no control over the amount of money they got. I solved Cochrane’s problem with two groups that did not function well, which involved major restructuring. Soares-Weiser was very grateful for this, which would have been difficult or impossible for Cochrane headquarters to achieve without my help.

Gartlehner: “The world outside does not perceive Peter as a problem. Cochrane will be in the defence immediately, having to explain the action, why did he get fired, and that will be so difficult to control.”

Burton: “I think you’re missing the point ...”

Lamb: “Peter’s evidence in that court case, on paper, using the Cochrane letter for expert advice in a forensic case for a woman accused of murdering her two children, that’s dynamite if that was out there in the public arena ... stuff that would do Cochrane’s reputation no end of damage.”

Burton: “That is an example of outrageous behaviour, outrageous and wrong behaviour ... the person who has actually complained to us about that is perfectly right, if they spoke to a journalist, they could put that in the public domain, the report is not in the public domain, but the fact that, the court records ...”

Hammerstein: “The person that complained [Loonen, see page 31] is accused of malpractice, and is ill-repute, and the whole case is about the secondary impact of [depression pills] which is not a trivial issue.”

My expert testimony was not “outrageous behaviour,” but Burton stepped up his attacks, which by now were shrill, and Lamb seconded him. [Counsel did not consider it a problem](#) that I had used my letterhead for my expert testimony. Furthermore, my report was for internal use and was never made public. Burton also talked about preventing damage by “rooting out the cause,” which sounded like extermination.

Clarkson: “Where is the place of saying, ‘we want you to consider your future’, as opposed to saying, ‘what your future is?’”

Burton: “I would suggest to you that we give that very serious consideration, because that is a face-saving way of doing it for everybody. But the issue here is, what I don’t want to be accused of is, us having made him sign some kind of confidentiality agreement, or that we’re gagging him, where if, all that happens then, that we’re accused of trying to, you know, I don’t want this to be accused of sort of trying to do anything untoward.”

Lamb: “I think it would be fair to give Peter the option to have a way of exiting and exiting gives him a little more dignity. I think we owe him that. But it does have to be handled pretty carefully.”

Clarkson: "So, just to clarify, is that then a discussion that starts with you know, we're ex-communicating you, or whatever the word is, as a member, however, you could take this other action."

Burton: "I would like to argue that we are very close to making a decision ... it was almost unanimous that Peter has breached the code of conduct as a member of the board, by the majority we've decided that he should be asked to resign from the board immediately. Is the next decision, do we think he has breached the Articles of Association as a member?"

Shortly afterwards, this happened:

Santesso: "So, the decision that Cochrane is actually asking someone to leave ..."

Marshall: "Requiring ..."

Burton: "No, we're terminating his membership."

Santesso: "I, I can't, can't believe that this is a Cochrane, is going to do now ..."

Gartlehner: "Yeah, I'm shocked too."

Santesso: "Yep, absolutely."

Meerpohl: "Yeah."

Meerpohl: "If you apply these words literally to many other people within the collaboration, I would assume that we could easily find 100 people who have broken the Articles of Association. So that gives room to people who don't like someone ... to proceed because we have set that precedent. You know, I might have broken the Articles of Association. My boss, Gerd Antes certainly has breached repeatedly the Articles of Association, and many others as well. Probably all people on the data sharing comment here, I mean, look, if you look at it, it puts us at risk, they are criticizing our strategic direction, it could be argued I guess ..."

Burton interrupts: "It's the degree of things, there is also this issue of reasonable opinion where we have to take everything ..."

Meerpohl: "If someone wants to blame something on me, they will find something probably. If someone wants to blame something on Gerald, they'll probably find something."

Burton: "But every organisation has rules and you know ..."

Santesso: "Is that what we're going to start doing? Start revoking people's membership in Cochrane? And people who, you know, are bringing in a lot of money into Denmark ... I think we need a line of where we're going here. We're going in the wrong direction."

Meerpohl: "It's disproportionate. It's disproportionate. Yeah, it's disproportionate."

Burton: "But the point is, people flout the laws and rules, and the response has to be proportionate. I think we are in an extraordinary position. I am not suggesting that this is going to be a repeatedly used measure, there is nobody who has demonstrated to us the pattern, the duration, the severity of the behaviour that we're complaining of here."

Howe: "It's not that we've started doing this now, we've not made up this rule, this rule has been in our existence for a long time."

Santesso: "Cochrane has been in existence for a long time, and it has never done this."

Howe: "Yeah, so? This is the very ever time that we've had to do it in 25 years."

Gartlehner: "Yeah, but this is like capital punishment what we're doing."

Hammerstein: "Yeah ... It's the nuclear option."

Clarkson: "What is the alternative then David?"

Koster: "Wait a second, we've got to go to Joerg."

The co-chairs didn't care that Gartlehner had described the sanction they were about to impose on me as capital punishment, for a crime no one had defined, as in Kafka's novel, *The trial*.

Many people could be punished for breaching the rules and the sanction was disproportionate. Three weeks after my expulsion, Gerd Antes wrote to me and others that he always used the Cochrane logo and letterhead to express personal opinions. When participating in hearings in the German parliament, he wrote about his expertise on Cochrane paper, as this was why he was invited, not because he was Gerd Antes. We should not apologise for our public appearances and wear a disclaimer that this was not Cochrane's view. If he were to tell members of parliament that, unfortunately, he was only presenting his personal opinion, it would be ridiculous.

My defenders on the board had not given up but tried to uphold the basic rules for justice. The most important one is: If you want to sentence one person but not another, you must be able to explain the difference between the two cases. Burton was unable to do this. When challenged, he talked about the degree of the alleged violations, but the problem was that [there were no violations](#).

Meerpohl challenged Burton, with a British understatement: "Views are slightly different as to the severity of these events to some extent, so if you really want to exert it, it would be very helpful for me at least, to be very explicit on what basis, so that we can have that really as a reference standard for the future."

Hammerstein: "Otherwise it's a global subjective view."

Faba: "I am not clear that Peter has acted or threatened to act in a manner, which is contrary to the interests of the charity ..."

Burton tried to interrupt.

Faba: "I don't think so, because I think ... he's done a very good contribution in favour of the charity."

Koster: "So, let's just clarify that and, um, then we have Jan and Tracey."

The co-chairs followed Schopenhauer's script the whole day. Interrupt the course of the dispute if you observe that your opponent has taken up a line of argument which will end in your defeat.

For all interventions, we need to judge the balance between benefits and harms. This is what Cochrane does. But the co-chairs derailed any such discussion. I accept that some people find me difficult because of my non-British directness, but I am convinced that any objective assessment of my performance in Cochrane would come to the conclusion that the benefits by far outweighed the harms I caused. My critics should ask themselves: Why is this man so popular with patients? Isn't this what Cochrane should be all about, to benefit patients?

As the Cochrane lynch mob was out to get me - as Jefferson put it - Clarkson apologised when she tried to withstand the group pressure from the co-chairs:

Clarkson: "Oh, sorry, I would like to do anything we can to avoid making this vote. And I suppose, David you just said this is the nuclear option. Realistically, what is the other option?"

Hammerstein: "Well, there could be different types of negotiation, I mean we're talking about him being eliminated as a member of Cochrane. We could allow him to be a member of Cochrane and just, you know, just not a member of the Board."

Santesso: "Yeah, I think that's a strong message. Yeah."

Hammerstein: "To recognise that we allow dissidents and minority opinions. We're not afraid of people publishing a few things that we don't agree with."

Howe: "I think Cochrane welcomes differential opinion, but it welcomes it in a constructive manner. I think the issue here is that it is very destructive."

Hammerstein: "Publicly, I don't think that's true."

Gartlehner: "I agree, it's disruptive for individuals but I don't think it is disruptive for the organisation. It's a big difference."

Faba: "Yeah, a big difference, I think we need to be very clear ..."

Howe: "Destructive."

Gartlehner: "Destructive, oh, OK, sorry, I misunderstood but it's the same."

Marshall: "Well, what we already know is that it is destructive in terms of the relationships with staff."

Santesso: "But how do you know that?"

Marshall: "Because that is what Counsel has said."

Gartlehner: "Yeah, that's a single person, maybe two."

Santesso: "We have more people leaving because of other people."

Gartlehner: "Within the CET!" [Wilson's Central Executive Team]

Santesso: "Yes! Not because of Peter! We have other people leaving because of other people."

Marshall: "This isn't about going on a witch-hunt ... to not act now would call our credibility into question."

Clarkson: "Safe-guarding as well, the health and staff representatives."

It is getting weirder and weirder. People know that Wilson's staff is leaving because of him. But Marshall immediately brought the conversation back on track by saying they were not on a witch-hunt. After Clarkson's little defence of me, she quickly re-joined the lynch mob instead of questioning Wilson's behaviour. This is what group pressure does to people.

Burton prepared for the finale:

"Um, the evidence before us suggests that there is no conversation that could be had with Peter, that leads to a committed serious change ... There is a pattern here ... These are long term issues, of disruptive behaviour, failure to behave collaboratively, producing a situation that cannot be remedied, someone whose behaviour is outrageous and wrong, has not been able to follow the Collaboration Agreement, that is clear, and I know that on its own, Counsel didn't censure him for that, but that is what Counsel sort of found, and you know, he doesn't abide by the rules. It's clear, he doesn't even accept Counsel's report. And Counsel articulated what is expected of a centre director and how they should behave, he doesn't even accept it. We're in a situation here where there is no other option."

No other option than the academic death penalty. The many lies exploded. With a preplanned outcome and no substance in the allegations, it makes sense that the lies got worse and accumulated towards the end. Five hours into the show trial against me, it was still uncertain if the board was willing to expel me, even though Burton had lied about me repeatedly and had invented all sorts of false accusations and hints including that I should have harassed Cochrane staff, even sexually.

As already explained, everything Burton just said was wrong. Burton acknowledged that Counsel didn't censure me but added: "that is what Counsel sort of found," like when Koster said that I did not break the policy but the spirit of the policy. He didn't do anything wrong, but ...

Schopenhauer called it, "Postulate what has to be proven". It always works, if repeated often enough.

Santesso: "What we are doing is removing him from the board, and that's pretty major ... the next step is, for me it's like a warning ... because I would not have even known that this was a process that could have actually taken place."

Koster: "The conversation I had with Peter in Seoul, he was fearful at that time that the directorship of his centre was in jeopardy, and he did not want that to happen. To me, that would have put the fear of God in me, to say, you know what, I better shape up and follow the policies and procedures, which he did not do."

Santesso: "Was he given a letter; I haven't seen anything?"

Koster: "Right well, this went back to complaints that were, you know, being ..."

Santesso: "But was anything official done with the Steering Group?"

Koster: "No, nothing official, they were discussions we've had, that people were trying to force him out, it's Mark Wilson, it's Lisa Bero, it's Jeremy, it's Cindy, you name it, we had a witch-hunt. They were trying to force him out because he knew he had done some stuff, but he wanted to be a bit repentant about it, but he knew he might lose, you know the Cochrane logo ..."

Santesso: "So, let's just do something 'official' now and then."

Koster: "But he had every opportunity to shape up after that, every opportunity, and yet, the stunts that he has pulled since then are just unbelievable ..."

Burton: "We're not talking about minor infractions here; we're talking about really serious stuff here."

Santesso: "But what are we talking about?"

Burton: "We're talking about the stuff here which has been independently investigated, but all the allegations he made about the behaviour of Mark and myself, which demonstrated to be wrong, so he is either misguided or he is maliciously raising those allegations."

These lies were brutal. I followed the rules, which the triumvirate didn't, and Wilson persecuted me all the time claiming I had breached them. As I had no idea what I should do to stop Wilson harassing me, I asked Koster and Marshall in Seoul to advise me. It was not a question of me changing behaviour. It was Wilson's behaviour that should have changed.

I had never said, written or indicated that Bero, Grimshaw or Farquhar, three previous co-chairs, were trying to force me out. The problem was caused by one man, Wilson. It was also mendacious to say that I knew I had "done some stuff." I have no idea what this was about. About my documented examples of mismanagement by Wilson and Burton, Hammerstein said:

"But that's not public, it's a private, internal investigation. And to make an allegation that Counsel says is not right is not an accusation against Peter."

Burton: "He accused the Editor-in-Chief of being in the pockets of the pharmaceutical industry, and that had to be changed and so, there's a series, this is not an isolated moment, this is year after year after year."

Koster: "We have the HPV article that came up recently, and now we hear there are a series of other articles. All I hear is, has anything been learned from the HPV article in the scientific debate? No ... he's going to push ahead and he's going to say that Cochrane's evidence is not trusted evidence and here's an example of it."

Cullum: "He can keep doing that, if he's not a member of the Cochrane Collaboration, that's fine, let's free him of the shackles."

Meerpohl: "When the Spokesperson Policy was developed, my recollection was that ... science is different from policies ... the policy is very explicit about this - is not applicable to a scientific debate about a Cochrane review."

Burton: "And no one is criticising his right to debate."

Meerpohl: "But Marguerite just brought up the HPV review again!"

Koster: "I was saying the process, and the behaviour that was exhibited ... was not in the best interests of the organisation. I'm not saying that the scientific debate should not be happening, but they could have gone through several other routes to make that debate happen, but he didn't, and he won't in the future ... if we don't revoke his membership, does anyone here want to be his babysitter? Please raise your hand?"

Santesso: "No one was babysitting him before he was on the board."

Burton: "No that's not true, the past five co-chairs, so, Jeremy, Jonathan, Lisa, Cindy, Marguerite at least, if not before, and just in case you have any doubt, the historical thing, there is a letter in the bundle from Jim Neilson, from 2003. This has been going on for years and years, and it is getting more and more difficult and more and more time consuming to do this babysitting, it's just, is true to say, that there is no idle threat, I just don't want to spend 6-7 hours a day, which I have done in the last few weeks in the run up to this board meeting, dealing with these issues ... does this look like an attractive job for people applying for David's post? What's the job like, what's it like dealing with people? Oh, it's a walk in the park. It's not, they spend hours dealing with these things and it has just drained people dry."

The co-chairs discredited themselves to an unbelievable degree here. Our criticism of the HPV vaccine review was brought up again, and also the Spokesperson Policy, which encourages mutual criticism. Koster was worried that I might say that Cochrane's evidence is not trusted evidence, but she didn't see the irony, that the whole "process" against me was the opposite of "trusted evidence."

I never had any important issues with the six co-chairs Burton mentioned, and he didn't care that Counsel found it unfair to me to go just three years back in time. Burton went 15 years back and referred to a letter from co-chair Neilson, although I had explained in my report to Counsel that there weren't any problems (see page 53). Moreover, Neilson strongly supported me when I ran for the Governing Board (see page 31).

If Burton spent many hours, it was his own fault. He could and should have handled the trivial dispute between Wilson and me easily and quickly.

Koster claimed I hadn't learned anything from the HPV debate, which she didn't know, as there was no evidence that could prove or disprove her statement during the six weeks between we published our paper and the board meeting.

Santesso: "I still go back to - I think we're doing enough by asking him to leave the board."

Marshall: "I would still like to think that we will be considering what the impact is on the CET [Central Executive Team] staff. Our employees, our fiduciary duty, if he remains in Cochrane, even if he's off the board, he is going to grind those guys down."

Koster: "Yep, he will continue to do so."

The lies escalated. I had never ground down Wilson or his staff; it was the other way around. I had been persecuted by Wilson and his staff, e.g. by Julie Wood, which I described in [my report to Counsel](#) (see page 20).

Burton lied bluntly when he said:

"I do believe, I genuinely believe the reason a lot of staff are stressed is because of the ... Jo Antony, Julie Wood before her, David, Mark, and more junior people, get considerable stress from dealing with Peter, I can only say that is my honest and sincere belief ... He's criticized David many times."

Wilson's staff was leaving because of his brutal and poor management. I had treated him and his staff respectfully and had not criticised Tovey "many times." As already noted, our only encounter was related to the Maudsley debate about the harms of psychiatric drugs (see page 78).

Santesso said several times that the staff left not because of me, but because of "someone else." The tyranny in Cochrane was so pervasive that she didn't dare name this person. In the novels about Harry Potter, the *You-Know-Who* or *He Who Must Not Be Named*, is Lord Voldemort, the archenemy of Potter, who has the power to vanquish the Dark Lord.

Cochrane was in deep trouble because it had employed a narcissist with psychopathic traits six years earlier who had destroyed the organisation. Instead of realising this and supporting me, I became the scapegoat to be sacrificed, like countless others in human history. The Incas killed their most precious citizens, their children, by throwing them out from a high mountain to please the gods when the harvest had failed, and witches were burned at the stake in Europe. I was now a pariah and the High Priests of Cochrane sacrificed one of their most precious contributors to please Cochrane's god, Mark Wilson, and reduce his wrath.

## The finale

The [Charity Commission states](#): "If the trustees are in dispute, and cannot reach a decision, they could consider formal mediation or other alternative dispute resolution." A professionally acting board would have done that. The board should never have voted about my expulsion, but the co-chairs went for the kill Wilson had looked forward to for so long.

Koster: "So, let's call the vote at this point, Catherine have you written something?"

Marshall: "Oh, that the Governing Board has determined that in accordance with section 5.2.1 of the Articles of Association, that will terminate the membership of Peter and give him notice to that effect."

Koster: "OK all in favour? And all not in favour?"

Burton: "One abstention."

Clarkson: "Yep."

Santesso: "So, Martin your vote, would your vote be ..."

Burton: "No, no, I'm equal, I'm not double or anything."

Hammerstein: "Is that a majority, 6 out of 12?"

Burton: "Well, it's 6 for, 5 against and one abstention, so it's a majority. It's a majority of one which I think is personally, I think is disappointing, very disappointed with that indeed ... I feel unhappy in many ways."

Those who expelled me, as Wilson had demanded, were Burton, Koster, Marshall, Cullum, Lamb and Howe. Hammerstein, Meerpohl, Gartlehner, Santesso, Clarkson and Faba refused to support this injustice with their vote.

During the show trial, Lamb called Cochrane a "broad church." Incidentally, *BMJ's* Editor-in-Chief also called it a [broad church](#), but several board members had argued that we should all speak with the same voice. This is not a broad church, but orthodoxy - the opposite of science.

One of [the ten commandments](#) in the narrow-minded Cochrane church is about minimising bias and avoiding conflicts of interest. The co-chairs were heavily conflicted. Burton because I had documented [his serious mismanagement](#), and evidently also Koster, as judged by her comments and the way she conducted the meeting. That Burton should not have been allowed to participate in the meeting, was not brought up by any of the board members, which was disappointing.



Janet Clarkson



Gladys Faba

Wilson was Burton's line manager, and, given Wilson's bullying behaviour, I assume he could threaten Burton's job security as director of the UK Cochrane centre if he didn't follow orders. This construct constituted another major conflict of interest for Burton's position as co-chair. But Burton never recused himself, not even when we discussed Wilson's bullying behaviour towards other people during the board only time in Lisboa when Wilson was not allowed to be present, and where Santesso burst into tears when she said that Burton was afraid of Wilson. Burton did the opposite of what he should have done. He dominated such discussions and quickly diverted them or ended them.

The show trial against me was invalid on multiple counts. A judge would never have allowed this to happen. Furthermore, when I appealed, it was the same board, or rather the remnants of it, that judged me again. This was the antithesis of justice.

### **13 My expulsion and the reactions in the media**

Burton and Koster informed me about my expulsion in an email sent the same day I was expelled:

We are writing to inform you of the outcome of the debate that took place at today's Board meeting.

After a long discussion of events, which have been documented for you, three motions were passed, to the following effect:

1. The Governing Board finds that Peter Gøtzsche has breached the Trustee Code of Conduct.
2. The Governing Board requires that Peter Gøtzsche resign as a Trustee with immediate effect.
3. The Governing Board will serve notice on Peter Gøtzsche of their decision to terminate his membership in accordance with clause 5.2.1 of The Articles of Association of The Cochrane Collaboration.

Please accept this letter as the notice (required under clause 5.3) in respect of the actions under clause 5.2.1. You will have the opportunity to be heard in writing as to why your membership should not be terminated. The Governing Board will consider any written representations made in that way by you if they are received at any time before midnight (BST) on Thursday 20th September 2018.

Given your behaviour today, we must also ask on behalf of the Governing Board that you do not try and attend any other Governing Board meetings.

Please note that you will remain bound by your obligations as a member of Cochrane pending the outcome of the process set out at point 3 above.

Interestingly, Burton's bad behaviour, when he would not allow me to tell the board after five hours of waiting that I would go back to my hotel, was transformed into my bad behaviour to give the board an excuse for not having to face the person they had just expelled.

It is not nice to execute someone. Koster informed the board that, "The Board has decided to cancel the dinner tonight. It's been a very long day." It would have awkward, but I had decided to come, to meet with my friends on the board and to see how my executioners reacted. The next morning, Howe went past me in the hotel lobby where I sat waiting for a colleague. When she waved her hand and smiled, as if nothing had happened, I said, "Thank you for assassinating me. It is most kind of you."

That same morning, I received another email from Burton and Koster, with the subject line: "STRICTLY PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL" with the message: "Please treat the email that we sent to you yesterday evening as strictly private and confidential." What? I was supposed to keep my execution confidential. Had they gone mad?

The same day, [I informed various people](#), including those on the centre directors' email list (but Cochrane headquarters quickly deprived me of this easy way of contacting my colleagues), about what had happened and what it meant for Cochrane. Here is a summary:

- No justification has been given for my expulsion aside from accusing me of causing "disrepute" for the organisation.
- The Governing Board has become a testimonial body that rubber-stamp the executive team's highly finalised proposals with practically no input from board members and exchange of views to formulate new policies.
- The growing top-down authoritarian culture and an increasingly commercial business model threatens the scientific, ethical and social objectives of the organisation.
- Many directors or other key staff of the oldest Cochrane centres have conveyed their dissatisfaction with the CEO's interactions with them.
- The CEO has threatened on several occasions to close the Nordic Cochrane Centre.
- Criticism has been raised concerning the overpromotion of reviews, conflicts of interest and the biased nature of some scientific expert commentary used by the Knowledge Translation Department of Cochrane.
- Despite our clear policies to the contrary, my centre, and others, have been confronted with attempts at scientific censorship, rather than the promotion of pluralistic, open scientific debate about the merits of concrete Cochrane reviews.
- Often it is forgotten that we are a scientific, grass-roots organisation whose survival depends entirely on unpaid contributions from tens of thousands of volunteers and substantial governmental support throughout the world.
- There has been great resistance and stalling related to improving Cochrane's conflict of interest policy.
- There is stronger and stronger resistance to say anything that could bother pharmaceutical industry interests.

- The hidden agenda behind my expulsion is a clear strategy for a Cochrane that moves it further and further away from its original objectives and principles. This is not a personal question. It is about the future of Cochrane. Much of my work has not been favourable to the financial interests of the pharmaceutical industry. Because of this, Cochrane has faced pressure, criticism and complaints. My expulsion is one of the results of these campaigns.
- Even though Cochrane is a charity, our “brand” and “product” strategies have taken priority over publishing reliable scientific results. What is at stake is the ability of producing credible and trustworthy medical evidence that our society values and needs.

The following day, Hammerstein, Santesso, Meerpohl and Gartlehner explained [why they resigned](#) from the board:

This week, the Cochrane Governing Board decided with a vote of 6 in favour, 5 opposed, and one abstention, to expel Peter Gøtzsche from his membership in Cochrane because he has been "causing disrepute" to Cochrane.

Four of us who opposed this decision have resigned from the Board as a result. We consider the Board’s use of its authority to expel Peter from Cochrane to be disproportionate. The general public, consumers, students, and researchers involved in Cochrane value the plurality of opinions, views, and perspectives Cochrane has worked hard to give voice to since its foundation. We believe that the expulsion of inconvenient members from the Collaboration goes against Cochrane ethos and neither reflects its founding spirit nor promotes the Collaboration’s best interests. We are concerned that these actions might cause great damage to the reputation of the Collaboration.

Governing Board members are expected to publicly uphold and defend all decisions taken. We could not adhere to this obligation in this case in good conscience. We also believe that those of you, who placed your trust in us to represent you on the Board, would not wish us to do so. For this reason, we have unfortunately felt the need to resign from the Cochrane Governing Board and have done so the day after the decision was taken.

It is our hope and deepest desire that this event will encourage all Cochrane members and the wider community to reflect upon where we currently find ourselves and give serious consideration to what we want for the future of Cochrane and its principles, objectives, and ethos.

Things moved fast. The day after my expulsion, Nigel Hawkes wrote in the *BMJ* about our criticism of the Cochrane HPV review.<sup>57</sup> In their attempt at rebutting our criticism, Cochrane’s Editor-in-Chief and his Deputy called our criticism inaccurate and “sensationalised.” They even reprimanded the journal:<sup>58</sup> “There are questions to be asked about the rigour of the peer review and editorial review by *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*. We call on *BMJ* to consider our report and to investigate whether the journal's quality assurance processes were appropriately fulfilled and whether the conclusions of the article are justified and proportionate. This is particularly important given the highly sensitive subject matter and the public health priority of this subject.”

---

<sup>57</sup> Hawkes N. Cochrane HPV vaccine review: BMJ journal defends “inconvenient criticisms.” *BMJ* 2018;14 Sept,362:k3927.

<sup>58</sup> Tovey D, Soares-Weiser K. [Cochrane’s Editor in Chief responds to BMJ EBM article criticizing HPV review](#). 2018; 3 Sept.

It is very rare that editors of a journal criticise the editors of another journal. Carl Heneghan and Igho Onakpoya made no apology for having published a paper that criticised an important Cochrane review. They said to the *BMJ* that, “Articles in our journal will seek to hold organisations to account and should not shrink from offering criticisms that may be considered inconvenient. Academic freedom means communicating ideas, facts and criticism without being censored, targeted or reprimanded. We believe that the article ... provokes healthy debate and poses important questions about the need to ensure that all available evidence is included in systematic reviews to properly inform healthcare decisions.” They also published the peer reviews.

Here are two interesting responses to Hawkes’ article:

Michael Baum, Professor emeritus of surgery, University College London: “I have always admired the work of the Cochrane Collaboration and have very high regard for Peter Gøtzsche, whom I know very well. Yes, he can be very abrasive in his manner and, yes, he can be provocative, but these are the qualities required by someone with intact scientific integrity who has sufficient courage of speaking truth to power ... I believe that Peter is a luminary of the Cochrane Collaboration and adds to the credibility of the organisation ... Without Professor Gøtzsche we might be minded to cease collaboration with Cochrane. I would therefore like to suggest that if Peter and the other board members who resigned in protest, are not re-instated we will withdraw our support and challenge their right to make use of our data sets that have been collected for decades as a result of financially unrewarded efforts by clinical scientists all over the world.”

Jeanne Lenzer, independent journalist and *BMJ* associate editor, New York: “This is deeply, deeply disturbing. The scientific process advances through vigorous examination of conflicting evidence and claims. To silence one side undermines this process ... Cochrane’s action in expelling Peter Gøtzsche is an ugly stain on Cochrane that will remain for many years to come. It reduces my trust ... Shame on Cochrane.”

In 2008, Lenzer and Shannon Brownlee, senior fellow at the New America Foundation, published the article, “Is there an (unbiased) doctor in the house?”<sup>59</sup> It contained a list of around 100 independent medical experts that reporters can turn to if they are looking for honest information. I was one of the experts: “Peter Gøtzsche, director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre and a member of the Danish group Doctors Without Sponsors, described why he joined the list: ‘Industry knows that buying doctors is an effective marketing tool ... far more effective than the dollars they spend on drug representatives. This leads to less than optimal health care for patients.’”

Three days after the show trial, *Science* published, “[Evidence-based medicine group in turmoil after expulsion of co-founder](#),” and Maryanne Demasi published, “[Cochrane – a sinking ship?](#)”

Demasi wrote that, “The Cochrane leadership accused Gøtzsche’s team of causing reputational damage to the organisation, fuelling anti-vaxxers and risking ‘the lives of millions of women worldwide by affecting vaccine uptake rates,’ according to a complaint by the editor of the Cochrane group that published the HPV review (Jo Morrison).” In this article, Tom Jefferson said:

“If your review is made up of studies which are biased and in some cases are ghost written or the studies are cherry picked and you don’t take that into account in your review, then it’s garbage in and garbage out ... with a nice little Cochrane logo on it.”

One of the board members who resigned said: “The prestige of a scientific institution has to do with its ability to manage critical debates, not censor them.”

---

<sup>59</sup> Lenzer J, Brownlee S. Is there an (unbiased) doctor in the house? *BMJ* 2008;337;206-8.

I said: "Science needs to be challenged, it should not be politically correct, it is not consensus seeking. You cannot call a public challenge to science 'controversial,' it's a pejorative term. It's simply what our job as scientists requires of us."

Richard Smith, previous Editor-in-Chief for the *BMJ*, [wrote](#): "I've known Peter for many years, and despite his capacity for speaking out in extravagant terms he's a gentle lovable man." He repeated the beginning of [his foreword](#) in my 2013 book about organised crime in the drug industry: "There must be plenty of people who shudder when they hear that Peter Gøtzsche will be speaking at a meeting or see his name on the contents list of a journal. He is like the young boy who not only could see that the emperor had no clothes but also said so. Most of us either cannot see that the emperor is naked or will not announce it when we see his nakedness, which is why we badly need people like Peter."

Jefferson published "[The Crucifixion of Brother Peter](#)". He called for a suspension of all legal and disciplinary actions currently underway; that the whole board should step down and should not run for re-election; that an interim board be established; and that new elections should be held under the auspices of a neutral body such as the Election Commission. None of this happened.

There were also critical articles in *Nature*,<sup>60</sup> *BMJ*,<sup>61</sup> *Lancet*,<sup>62</sup> and *Le Monde*.<sup>63</sup> The Cochrane Governing Board was heavily criticised in a second *BMJ* paper by Nigel Hawkes:<sup>64</sup>

A statement read to the Cochrane annual colloquium this week in Edinburgh by the organisation's co-chair, Martin Burton, did not make clear exactly what Gøtzsche did to warrant his expulsion. Burton referred to "repeated bad behaviour over many years" but legal reasons and reasons of privacy, he said, prevented him from saying more.

Cochrane's lawyer, Thomas Grant, concluded that it did not make sense to go over old ground: "All these events are historic and the parties resolved them at the time, or decided to let them lie ... I do not think it would be fair on PG [Peter Gøtzsche] to come to conclusions on matters which lie in the past" ... advice ignored by the board, which in the statement read by Burton made the claim that Gøtzsche's bad behaviour was of a longstanding nature.

Gøtzsche's version is that Grant's report did not "at any point" conclude that he had brought the organisation into disrepute, the grounds on which he was sacked.

The allegation made was that he had abused his position in Cochrane to advance personal views as if they were those of the organisation, a breach of its spokesperson policy. On two specific examples considered by Grant where breaches were alleged to have occurred, his report (as quoted by Gøtzsche) said that it could not be clearly stated that Gøtzsche was speaking officially on behalf of Cochrane.

"I am not sure it would be fair to censure PG," Grant concluded. It is plain, however, that relations between Gøtzsche and Wilson had totally broken down. At a board meeting in Lisbon, Gøtzsche charges, Wilson lost his temper. "He shouted, called me a liar, and said that I couldn't be trusted because I changed my views all the time." His statement concludes by calling for the resignation of the board, which, he says, has caused "tremendous harm to Cochrane."

---

<sup>60</sup> Vesper I. [Mass resignation guts board of prestigious Cochrane Collaboration](#). 2018; 17 Sept.

<sup>61</sup> Hawkes N. Cochrane director's expulsion results in four board members resigning. *BMJ* 2018;17 Sept;362:k3945.

<sup>62</sup> Burki T. The Cochrane board votes to expel Peter Gøtzsche. *Lancet* 2018;392:1103-4.

<sup>63</sup> Foucart S. Peter Gøtzsche, le médecin par qui la controverse arrive. *Le Monde* 2018; 22 Sept:14.

<sup>64</sup> Hawkes N. Cochrane director says his sacking was flawed and came after "show trial". *BMJ* 2018;20 Sept;362:k4008.

The *BMJ* asked Cochrane to comment on Gøtzsche's claims and on the future status of the 17 Cochrane reviews he has published but was told that while the process was ongoing it was impossible to do so.

This last sentence is hilarious because the board has never been able to explain why I was expelled, simply because there was no reason for it. They tried, but all their attempts to do so were untruthful.

In response to one of Hawkes' articles, the International Society of Drug Bulletins [wrote](#) that it, already in 2013, criticised Cochrane for allowing conflicted authors with the healthcare industry, and that its membership journals would not allow this any longer. Furthermore, also in contrast to Cochrane, none of the editors could have such conflicts. "Cochrane is damaging the trust and credibility doctors, pharmacists, scientists and patients have put in them ... ISDB therefore supports Gøtzsche's claim that a recovery from this dire situation would call for the dissolution of the present board, new elections and a broad-based participatory debate about the future strategy and governance of the organization."

### **Burton's instructions to Counsel were fraudulent**

After having read the above, you are now in a position to understand why the material Burton submitted to Counsel was not impartial. There were [many inaccuracies and misleading statements](#) in the "Instructions to Counsel" and important documents in my favour had been left out. Aggravating this extreme power imbalance, I did not have access to legal expertise.

Wilson had contributed to the 330 pages in the binder, which I had not. Due process would have required asking me if the material was appropriate and correct, and whether important information was missing. This did not happen even though the "Index to Counsel's Papers" showed that a response from me was "missing" in three cases. This was labelled TBC, which I thought meant "to be collected," but it actually meant "to be confirmed," which did not make sense for information to be "missing."

Counsel was asked to assess if I had made public statements and published papers that were *potentially damaging* to Cochrane's reputation. This went too far. Virtually everything people say or write has the potential to be misinterpreted. Consider also that cars and prescription drugs have the potential to kill people but that does not make them illegitimate. My published papers are scientifically robust; they have been peer reviewed; and no one has found errors in my research. Counsel should have assessed if any of my papers *had damaged* Cochrane's reputation. The answer to this is: No, quite the contrary.

What evidence did the CEO have that my statements were not evidence-based and that my comments had damaged the reputation of Cochrane? None. It was wrong to force me to prove I did not cause reputational damage instead of the CEO needing to prove that I did. No such proof was ever presented by anyone. The burden of proof was reversed and landed on me.

It was also wrong to ask Counsel to assess any harms I might have caused. Counsel was not asked to assess any harms Wilson had caused, including undermining me as the leader of the Nordic Cochrane Centre and the position of many other centre directors, and issuing statements dissociating Cochrane with my research group instead of mounting proper scientific debate.

Cochrane reviews aim to describe the balance between benefits and harms of the assessed interventions. A powerful drug causes more harm than a weak one, but usually also leads to more

benefit. The more you achieve, the more harm you will cause. Counsel should have been instructed to assess the balance between benefits and harms.

From the binder: "On 14 March 2014 MW [Mark Wilson] and the then co-chairs wrote to PG [Peter Gøtzsche] following the publication of a book and video in which PG appeared to advocate that every patient taking psychotropic medication should stop taking their medication."

This was a lie. I have never advocated this and my book<sup>65</sup> did not advocate it. I have always warned against stopping psychiatric drugs abruptly and have advocated that we should use these drugs very sparingly.

"PG had provided his own (potentially controversial) opinions to the Court on Cochrane branded paper ... thus raising concerns as to the impartiality and independence of Cochrane as an organisation."

This was plain nonsense. My report was not public but was sent to the court, and as the co-chairs hadn't seen it, they couldn't have any views on it.

"As a result of statements made by PG, Cochrane has on more than one occasion considered it necessary to issue public statements clarifying its position ... statement issued on 3 May 2018 in response to the Tweet by Anton Pottegård concerning PG's comments concerning the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs."

This was wrong. Cochrane did not issue any statement on 3 May or any other date in relation to Pottegård. Furthermore, there was absolutely nothing about benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs in the announcement of our seminar for psychiatrists about how to withdraw them safely. Pottegård's tweet was this one:

"You have asked Gøtzsche to distinguish his personal views from that of Cochrane regarding psychotropics. Yet, he uses Cochrane affiliation when inviting for deprescribing symposium, alongside IIPDW.com (!), and cochrane-email for signup. Comments?"

Our announcement said: "Peter C. Gøtzsche held a similar course in Copenhagen in 2017 and taught psychiatrists at such a course in Göteborg in 2017. Co-founder of the International Institute for Psychiatric Drug Withdrawal in 2017 [IIPDW]." What was wrong with that?

Nothing was too small or too foolish to not be taken seriously by Wilson. Jo Anthony responded to Pottegård: "Cochrane takes seriously all feedback from our community, and we have shared your comments with senior leadership for further action. If you would like to submit a formal statement directly, please use our website: [cochrane.org/contact](http://cochrane.org/contact)."

Anthony responded without consulting me, which violated our agreement. I could have told her that Pottegård is a well-known troublemaker we should ignore. Further, Twitter, Facebook and other social media provide a forum where people write before they think, and then forget about it. Pottegård forgot about it. He never submitted a formal complaint.

Our advertisement said that we did a Cochrane review on withdrawal of depression pills. The seminar was therefore relevant for our Cochrane activities, but we did not announce it as an official Nordic Cochrane Centre event, because we feared for Wilson's retaliation.

Wilson's micromanagement hit us anyway. He was unhappy that we had asked people to register at [general@cochrane.dk](mailto:general@cochrane.dk). He proposed to respond in this way to Pottegård: "There are a wide range of views within Cochrane on the benefits and harms of psychiatric drugs, of which Professor Gøtzsche's is one. The seminar was not an official Cochrane event, nor was it publicised as such. Professor Gøtzsche has agreed to use his affiliation as Professor of Clinical Research

---

<sup>65</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly medicines and organised crime: How big pharma has corrupted health care](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2013.

Design and Analysis at the University of Copenhagen in his work on this subject in future to avoid any potential confusion.”

Should the CEO of a huge organisation use his time on such trifles? Didn't he have more important things to do? The only bit in Wilson's tweet that wasn't irrelevant or incorrect was: “The seminar was not an official Cochrane event, nor was it publicised as such.”

From Burton's binder: “It has transpired subsequently that there is an issue between PG and MW as to what exactly was said and agreed at the meeting.”

There was no such issue. This was the meeting in Lisboa where I brought two witnesses and where Wilson tampered with the minutes, which I can prove as I recorded the meeting.

“Counsel should be aware that there is a lack of consensus as to what was agreed at the board only meeting in April 2017.”

There wasn't but Wilson pretended there was. This was about whether Wilson's special requirements for me still applied. There was no lack of consensus, which the co-chairs knew there wasn't, as they were present at the meeting. They lied bluntly about this to please Wilson.

“There have in any event been issues historically regarding the agreement of minutes. Counsel is referred by way of example to the email correspondence between PG, MW and David Tovey between July and August 2015 relating to the Minutes of a Meeting on 9 July 2015.”

This proved that Wilson was involved with collecting material for Counsel and that it was biased against me. I did not tamper with meeting minutes, which the triumvirate did in Genève and on other occasions, but there was nothing about this in Burton's “Instructions to Counsel.”

“Allegations of ‘bullying behaviour’ and ‘management by fear’ on the part of MW.” The co-chairs knew that these were not allegations but something four board members had observed.

“Counsel is referred to the dispute resolution procedure in the event of a dispute between the CEO and a Centre Director, which is set out at clauses 22 to 25 of the Collaboration Agreement ([Tab 3](#)) and which states that:

- a. In the event of a dispute between the CEO and a Centre Director they are required to make every good faith effort to resolve the dispute between themselves for a period of six weeks; and
- b. A route of appeal to the Governing Board is available only after the expiry of the six week resolution period and following an attempt in the first instance by the Centre Directors' Executive to resolve the dispute.”

Burton [tampered with the evidence in my disfavour](#) to such a degree that it was fraud. Clause 22 in [Tab 3](#) is this one:

“In the event of a dispute between the CEO and the NCC Director on Cochrane-related business or issues, both will make every good faith effort to resolve it amicably within six weeks. The CEO and/or the Centre Director may call upon the Centre Directors' Executive to advise on the resolution of the dispute.”

“May call” means that *it is not a requirement* that the Centre Director needs to involve the Centre Directors' Executive to resolve the dispute before appealing to the Governing Board. So, there is no obligation to do this.

Burton's fraud favoured Wilson. In Lisboa, I tried twice to resolve our differences amicably, while Wilson bullied me, shouted, and called me a liar. Based on the fraud, Counsel might have drawn the erroneous conclusion that I had failed to call upon the Centre Directors' Executive before I appealed to the board.

Burton's fraud was clearly deliberate. He could have copied and pasted the text in the Collaboration Agreement into his "Instructions to Counsel," which would have been the natural and easiest thing to do, but instead, he committed fraud.

### **Wilson's gobbledygook at my last centre directors' meeting**

My last centre directors' meeting took place three days after my expulsion, the day before Burton's hate speech. The meeting was scheduled to last 75 minutes and the agenda reflected Wilson's dominating influence everywhere in Cochrane. He had reduced the centre directors to spectators to the shows staged by himself and his leadership team. Only 25 minutes were allotted for directors to speak while Wilson's team had 50 minutes.

Two months into my short stint as a Cochrane Governing Board member, we received an email from Wilson saying, "I'm extremely proud of and pleased with the documents we have prepared for your meeting in Geneva; and of the substantial work that they reflect and represent." This is short of saying, "I am extremely proud of myself," as Wilson employed and guided his staff. Others were not so impressed.

The 47 directors in the room requested to drop several agenda items and to discuss my expulsion instead. Co-chair of the meeting, Swiss Centre Director Erik von Elm, lamented that there would not be the usual report from a centre director on the board, as they had all resigned (apart from Burton, but he did not show up). He therefore asked Wilson to give a report.

I said that I was still on the board because I had a week to appeal my expulsion, and that I would like to give a report. I noted that there had been disagreements during several years between Wilson and me about the interpretation of the Spokesperson Policy and that I had tested it empirically and found that by far most people agreed with me – I had not breached the policy.

I spoke about Cochrane's hired lawyer that was asked to go 15 years back in time, "you must find something on this guy because we don't like him, so we need to expel him," and that he came up empty handed. I talked about Burton's amateur theatre (see page 95) and explained why none of the four directors were any longer on the board.

Wilson spoke after me. He was in deep trouble because he had plotted my expulsion and was now expected to explain the non-existing reason for it. It was total gobbledygook. Like Burton, he spoke about processes and beat about the bush with management doublespeak. He was so incoherent that, if it had been a court trial, I think the judge would have asked him to come back when he was sober. I recorded his utterings:

"Um, so, it needs to be said, um, as CEO I was not in the whole, um, session that, that Peter was describing, I am only in the, as the CEO, at the service of the board, I was only in the business sections of the meeting, um, but precisely because, um, Peter has said that the process is ongoing, he has revealed something which the board has not in its statement last night, um, which, um, which is of course that he is the, um, individual whom the board has received complaints about, and, um, um, followed a process of investigating those complaints.

That process is still ongoing, as Peter, he is quite right, he said, he has, um, a period, um, um, to, to make further, um, further statements, um, to, um, um, to, to attempt to change the board's mind to rescind its position and therefore, um, um, the board, um, and I, um, can't say, um, um, and can't give a complete, um, um, picture, nor, nor should Peter in this, in this or other environment, nor should other board members and they are, they are aware of that, um, now obviously, since the board has, there is no question that this is an extraordinary situation,

and there is no question that this is a Governing Board that is deeply split on its, um, assessment of, um, um of those complaints presented before it, um, so, um, all I would urge you to, to do is to, to please allow us to, um, to, to continue the process to, um, to its proper end, because, as, um, Peter said, um, when you start talking about lawyers and you start talking about, um, disputes, um, in the way meetings are conducted, appeals are conducted, and so on, then of course all of us are in a difficult situation.

So, I would just, I'm aware of the statements that Peter has made actually are, he sent it to you, and you are aware that the statements that the four board members who resigned, um, um, the statement that they have made, and I hope you are aware, too, that the statement that the board made, made last night, um, I hope, I perfectly understand that the messages from, from Joerg, um, made over night, um, that everything should be transparent, and there should be a big conversation about all of the circumstances that are currently, um, um, been gone through, um, but I would have to say, they can't be, um, um, you are not in possession of, um, of all the information, um, I am not in possession of all the information, um, um, board members have been and, um, I would say, the process is continuing. Thank you."

A comedian couldn't have performed better than this.

The [statement](#) the board had issued the evening before on the Cochrane website, which Wilson spoke about, was uninformative. I was referred to as "an individual:"

### **Message from the Governing Board**

This week at its meeting in Edinburgh, Cochrane's Governing Board considered, as planned, the findings of an independent review and additional complaints related to the conduct of a Member. The Board's conclusion was communicated to the individual concerned and is part of an ongoing process. The Co-Chairs of the Board will provide further details once this process is complete.

Following this, four Board members (Gerald Gartlehner, David Hammerstein Mintz, Joerg Meerpohl and Nancy Santesso) decided to resign as Cochrane trustees with immediate effect. This situation required further changes in the composition of the Board in order to comply with [Cochrane's Articles of Association](#), and as a result Rae Lamb and Catherine Marshall, two appointed trustees, volunteered to step down.

An election for new Board members will take place soon. In the meantime, the Board will continue to govern The Cochrane Collaboration as usual, guided by our [principles](#), [Charter](#) and Articles. The Board completed its planned business today and expresses its strong support for the commitment and professionalism of Cochrane's Central Executive Team.

As the 25th Cochrane Colloquium gets underway in Edinburgh, the Governing Board looks forward to welcoming nearly 1,300 participants from 57 countries to celebrate our theme of 'Cochrane for all: better evidence for better health decisions'.

### **Marguerite Koster and Martin Burton**

*Governing Board Co-Chairs*

The hashtag for the Colloquium was #CochraneForAll. On a website, Jon Brassey suggested #CochraneForAllExceptPeterGøtzsche.<sup>66</sup> He also wrote: "Cochrane is seen by many as being some

---

<sup>66</sup> Brassey J. [Ugly scenes in the Cochrane Collaboration as Peter Gøtzsche is expelled](#). 2018; 17 Sept.

lovely cuddly charitable organisation that does lots of ‘good’ and that is why it does so well in attracting volunteers. But the more it moves away from this position and into the ‘corporate’ (perhaps being seen as just another large ruthless commercial organisation) they may find their pool of volunteers evaporating rapidly – which would be a disaster.”

At our meeting, Gartlehner explained that they resigned because they could not defend the board’s decision and that the matter was far greater than me and had hurt Cochrane. Dutch Centre Director Rob Scholten said that he hoped the board would not decide that people would be expelled from Cochrane, but that had already happened.

Co-chair and Dutch Centre Director Lotty Hooft called for a discussion about whether the directors wanted to work in a scientific organisation where it was allowed to expel people with different scientific opinions and asked when such a discussion could come on the agenda.

Wilson said that a discussion should not take place with only partial information. However, since the board would continue to provide partial and misleading information, this was like saying that a discussion would never take place. Wilson again spoke about processes, which it is convenient to hide behind. He was very uncomfortable and continued speaking gobbledygook:

”I don’t know when the process is completed, is going to be completed. But, um, um, and in essence it is not for me, but the board has said that they will share, that they will share information, and, absolutely, I will imagine that the discussion, um, about this has to take place once that process is, is, um, um, is made. Now, um, you know, there is no way that, um, we can be in a situation, um, in which, um, the discussion is, is taking place with, um, with partial information, in the middle of a process, but I can, um, you know, I will certainly, really, Council members would really let to the board that, um, you know, that the desire, um, that you and others have, to, to, to be in a position to be able to discuss the final resolution of, um, this dispute.”

Pure nonsense. Gerd Antes complained that he heard the word “process” too often while nobody explained what it was, or how long it would take, and he said that people in a transparent organisation shouldn’t be kept in the dark.

Empathy and listening are not among Wilson’s strengths. He ignored Antes’ complaint and used the word “process” five times in his reply:

“That’s not confidential. But the process, the process is, I can’t remember whether Peter alluded to it, that he has seven days from, um, from Thursday, um, so, I effectively, by the end of next week, um, Peter, Peter has an opportunity to, um, to submit any submission that he wants to make, and the board will meet in the week after to consider those, um, and a decision will then be taken, um, um, that, um, at the end of that point then, um, that decision will be communicated to Peter, and, and, and then Peter, Peter, Peter individually, obviously can respond accordingly, so, um, it is difficult to say what the, what the, um, when the process is complete because there may be different processes, um, but, um, that’s the internal, um, board, um, process as it defined it.”

Cochrane was processing itself to death. Von Elm also alluded to processes when he talked about the Council, which would try to understand the issues and come up with a hopefully shared position after they had held meetings during the following days.

French Cochrane Director Isabelle Boutron reminded people that the board’s decision had already caused important damage, and that many French people were asking what was happening and were questioning Cochrane, whether they should support Cochrane, and whether there could be discussions in future within the organisation. She said they couldn’t wait “for the process” to have a clear understanding of the situation.

In his reply, Wilson only used “process” once but switched to talking about communication, four times. This was typical of Cochrane’s central management. It was all about rules, processes and communication (also known as PR or spin), which were supposed to solve all problems. Wilson’s unintelligible ravings continued:

“I, I, I appreciate that, and, and, um, and all I can say is that, you know, that the process at least in relation to the, to the board and its final decision on, on this matter, has to, has to take place, and then, after that, um, that the communication will be out, and the communication from the board will have to explain in ways that, that, um, that make clear, some, um, eh, the, um, the challenges and the fears and the concerns that have been expressed by those board members who resigned, um, and by, um, and by, clearly those who fear that it is a, um, um, um, in straining of, of scientific debate inside Cochrane, it is not, I, I can say from my perspective, it is not, it is not, but then, um, you know, as Peter, as Peter said, he would say, I would say that anyway, um, um, I, I don’t want to be drawn into many of the other details and elements, um, that have not been mentioned in, in the communications that have gone around because it is not my place right now, as part, as in, at this point in the process to do that as improper, I won’t, um, so, I would rather take, with a best view in the world, um, any, um, you know, concerns or arrows or whatever that, that, you know, that is at ... the moment because now is not the time, so, I apologise, this is about, um, please be patient, um, but, I, I give you my word that, as CEO I will do my best to work with the board, to fully communicate the reasons for its decision.”

Von Elm said that centre directors should not be pushed or feel obliged to position themselves, especially not from outside pressure. This was typical for Cochrane under Wilson. It no longer responded to the outside world but was inward looking. He added that if there were direct requests for what was happening, he suggested to refer to the communications that had come out so that everybody could make up their own mind. This was ridiculous. The Governing Board’s “communications” didn’t tell people anything.

Karsten Juhl Jørgensen said: “As Peter’s Deputy Director, I think I would like to point out that of course this decision has implications for many other people than just Peter. There is a whole centre with staff, and of course our situation now is quite unclear. And I think I speak for everyone in the room when I say that this fills us with immense sadness. So, I think this is really something much more than a case about Peter. Peter is democratically elected and has views that are not always in accordance with the Cochrane leadership, so, expelling him of course challenges the democratic foundation of Cochrane, and I think that is very serious, too. It is not just a matter of scientific dispute, and I fully support Lotty, I mean, this whole process really questions whether this would still be an organisation that you would want to contribute to.”

Despite Wilson’s presence, two centre directors had now openly wondered whether Cochrane was an organisation they would like to be in.

Singapore Cochrane Director Edwin Chan said that what was most jarring to him was the statement that I would potentially be expelled. He explained that earlier, when there was no formal membership of Cochrane, you were a member if you contributed, and that therefore no one could be expelled. He hoped that, within a professional organisation, we could distinguish between scientific disagreements, which will always happen, and which can be robustly debated, refuted and argued in publications, and other disputes. He called for other solutions than expulsion, which went against the whole spirit of the Cochrane Collaboration.

Gerd Antes called for a powerful political discussion within the Collaboration and noted, in response to von Elm, that we didn't position ourselves. Others did, and they were making jokes about the Collaboration.

Iberoamerican Cochrane Director Xavier Bonfill had attended a meeting for the Iberoamerican network the day before and said that probably everyone was shocked, frustrated, and angry about what had happened. They did not understand it or why Cochrane was not capable of dealing with differences in a more constructive way, especially at a colloquium whose motto was 'Cochrane for all.' He felt that Cochrane representatives had the right to ask if warranties had been respected, as this was a process in which Cochrane assessed the conduct of a person to decide if he was going to be expelled. He noted that there were other bodies in the Collaboration that had the responsibility for assessing in a more neutral and objective way if someone deserved this kind of treatment, and that it was the first time a member had been expelled from the Collaboration in 25 years. Cochrane needed volunteers; it was a democratic, open, and transparent organisation, and it was the right of everyone to be respected in a constructive and fair way.

Bonfill was also critical of the timing – that a decision was taken the day before the colloquium started – because the issue would contaminate and affect all discussions. He asked if it was planned and the outcome was expected, and he was disappointed that co-chair Martin Burton, who was also a centre director, wasn't present and gave an explanation because it wasn't a minor issue, but a very important question.

Wilson: "Just, just to say to Xavier, I have had nothing to do with this, what has been said, this has been a Governing Board process. So, that needs to be said. In relation to other business ..."

Wilson intended to go back to familiar territory, his own agenda, but Gartlehner intervened:

"This is an extremely important topic ... four board members resigned, and we should probably not just move on to the next agenda item. I have the feeling that there is still much more need for a discussion, and just my personal view is that it would be wrong to postpone it because the damage is happening right now. If you look at the media, what is going on, the damage is happening now. People will have to issue statements; the press is coming."

It was then decided that the remaining 30 minutes should be used to continue the discussion.

I explained that, since it had been a semi-legal process, launched against me, I had asked for getting legal representation and for money to pay for it, pointing out that I had donated more than 30 million Danish crowns to Cochrane IT development, which Mark Wilson took over against the wishes of my hospital and the Danish Government some years earlier, and that our centre did not get any economic compensation, which we had asked for.

I noted that I had not been allowed to defend myself throughout six hours where the board tried to find an excuse for expelling me, and that many things were said about me that weren't true.

Hooft supported me. She talked about "trusted evidence," the Cochrane motto, which we did not currently have, and democracy, and asked whether she was the only one questioning whether the voting was valid at all.

Wilson explained that, according to the rules, the current board of only six out of the usual thirteen could still function, even after two members had needed to step down to comply with the rules, as there must be more internal than external members.

I responded: "There are rules and there are moral imperatives. The remnants of the board could choose to resign, so that we could get a completely new board. That would morally be the correct thing to do considering what the board did to me. And this is not a personal thing, that I

am bringing this up, that it could resign with the motivation that, okay, that wasn't due process. Very, very far from due process. We made a huge error; we have harmed the Collaboration tremendously; we will resign. That would be the only decent thing to do for the remaining board members."

A centre director said that the centres could use this opportunity to make a statement about what centres believed Cochrane meant to them. Von Elm asked what the process would be and said that they didn't have a draft proposal.

People protested and talked over each other, and someone screamed: "It's not that difficult!" I said: "Cochrane is drowning in processes, let's work!"

I launched a simple proposal that I suggested we voted on: "The centre directors support the motto of the colloquium, 'Cochrane for all.'"

This would send a good signal. No processes. We would support that Cochrane was inclusive, also for people who disputed the science.

Von Elm tried to explain that these were separate issues and talked about not dominating people. I questioned his reasoning and asked: "How can it be separate? That's the motto for the whole colloquium. Come on now, Erik. So, Cochrane isn't for all?"

Wilson: "The message was from the Governing Board. We are the servants of the Governing Board ..."

Gartlehner showed his disdain for this statement by calling it a platitude.

"Sorry Gerald but we are ... There will be a communication from the board ... as regards the Twitter storm ... participants in the discussion have gone public, that's you guys – board members who lost the vote, have resigned and gone public. So, you have created the public outrage, so, to then use the public outrage to then say, Cochrane must do something out of the proper process is, to my mind, improper."

Wilson tried to put the blame on others for the calamity he had himself caused, which tactic Schopenhauer called "Turn the tables." He was now in familiar territory and did not rave around any longer and did not stutter. But it did not work. Meerpohl was disappointed that none from the board came to discuss with the centre directors when the matter was so important. Von Elm had surely learned from the Cochrane leadership how to handle explosives by referring to formalities to avoid any discussion of burning issues. He replied to Meerpohl: "That was not on the agenda."

So, the news that I had been expelled was not on the agenda! [How deep could Cochrane sink?](#) The news had spread like a wild-fire, and the directors of course expected to discuss this. The only thing lacking in this farce was for Wilson to say that the news needed to be carefully digested by his Knowledge Translation Department – his equivalent of Orwell's Ministry for Truth or the Chinese Communist Party – before being communicated to the outside world.

### **Burton's hate speech at the Annual General Meeting**

Many people were angry because they had not heard any good reason for expelling one of Cochrane's most prominent members who had contributed a lot to the organisation, to the methodology of systematic reviews, to science, and to helping patients, which is Cochrane's *raison d'être*.

Hammerstein quickly established a resistance movement. We tried to find out how we could overthrow the government, which wasn't easy. There was nothing in the Articles of Association

about what to do with a dysfunctional board. Our only possibility was to call for a vote of no confidence at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and we collected signatures for this statement:

Given the present lack of confidence and democratic representation in the Governing Board we request this resolution to be considered as the first point on the Agenda of the AGM held the 17th of September 2018 in Edinburgh:

1. The immediate dissolution of the present Governing Board.
2. The election by the AGM of a temporary standing Governing Board with the objectives of organising the election of a new Governing Board within 90 days and the organisation of a broad debate on the future of the Cochrane Collaboration.

Wilson's indecency knew no bounds. Jørgensen said that Wilson had threatened to remove me as author of my Cochrane reviews if I wasn't cooperative and conciliatory in my upcoming appeal to the board. However, Wilson had no such authority; the academic rules ensure that no one can deprive others of their well-deserved authorships.

In a world of pigs,<sup>67</sup> some are more equal than others. During the board meeting, Napoleon's right hand, Burton, noted that I could say what I wanted "within the bounds of decency, defamation and hate speech." Only four days later, Burton delivered a formidable hate speech about me at the Annual General Meeting. It is on [YouTube](#) (starts after 36m20s) and is published as a [statement](#) on the Cochrane website.

I have published [my comments](#) on this statement, which is highly defamatory and misleading. Cochrane headquarters ensured that all the 30,000 contributors to Cochrane saw it because they sent it out via group email lists, pasting the speech in the body of the email so that no one would miss it.



From right to left: Burton, Howe, Faba, Cullum and Clarkson (in Edinburgh)

---

<sup>67</sup> Orwell G. *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg; 1945.

Before we came to this point on the agenda, we had been through the usual tributes to prominent people who had died since the last colloquium. One was Douglas Altman. When I co-founded Cochrane in 1993, it was with such giants as Altman, with whom I have published more papers than with anyone else, as already noted. But Burton was ice cold. It was all about getting the audience's sympathy for his "capital punishment," as Gartlehner had called it. Burton did not acknowledge any of my many achievements.

The statement was undersigned "Cochrane Governing Board," but as I was still a board member and didn't know about the statement before Burton read it aloud, the authorship was false, which is a serious violation of publishing rules. I wrote to the board and asked who drafted the statement and who subsequently read it and approved it. I also requested that the board inserted an apology, explaining what had happened, which is always required for instances of false authorship. I furthermore asked the board to consider apologising for its many untrue statements about an unnamed "individual", me. I never got a reply, not even when I wrote to Wilson and Tovey and pointed out the misconduct. Cochrane leaders had stopped caring about ethics.

The statement was about "the behaviour of one individual," which everyone knew was me. "We wanted to behave fairly and with integrity, in a process that respected the privacy of an individual." It was none of this and by reading the statement aloud, the board did not respect my privacy.

"This is about the behaviour of one individual. There has been a lengthy investigation into repeated bad behaviour over many years."

This is highly misleading. The so-called lengthy investigation was carried out in a haste. Even worse, the text insinuated (why else mention it?) that the investigation found me guilty of something, which isn't true. Jos Verbeek asked twice at the AGM what the alleged "bad behaviour" was about but did not get a meaningful reply.

"Four board members chose to resign and have actively disseminated an incomplete and misleading account of events. At the same time, others contributed to a public and media campaign of misinformation."

These accusations were outrageous, and the board provided no evidence for them, or indeed, for anything else.

"To act in the best interests of Cochrane."

This was hypocritical. If true, the board would not have expelled me; Burton would not have given a hate speech; and the board would have resigned. Cochrane's current leadership harmed the charity hugely.

"We cannot tell you everything ... individuals have a right to privacy and confidentiality."

When you don't have a case, you either say you can't talk, or you spread a bunch of lies. The board did both.

"As the board, we are in fact the employers of the Cochrane staff. All our staff, and our members, have the right to do their work without harassment and personal attacks. We are living in a world where behaviours that cause pain and misery to people, are being 'called out'. This board wants to be clear that while we are trustees of this organisation, we will have a "zero tolerance" policy for repeated, seriously bad behaviour. There is a critical need for ALL organizations to look after their staff and members; once repeated, seriously bad behaviour had been recognized, doing nothing was NOT an option."

This was the worst part. Burton used dramatic intonations and put undue emphasis on words such as "[zero tolerance](#)." The insinuations were clear. Several people thought I had sexually

harassed women, committed serious crimes repeatedly, or had bullied Cochrane staff. None of this was true; and there was no support in Counsel's report or elsewhere for such allegations. In contrast, I gave many examples in my report to Counsel that I had been bullied, often in the most disrespectful way, by Cochrane's CEO and his staff.

"So, here are the facts as we are able to report them. We may be able to tell you more later, we may not. Time will tell.

This Board decision is **not** about freedom of speech.

It is **not** about scientific debate.

It is **not** about tolerance of dissent.

It is **not** about someone being unable to criticize a Cochrane Review."

Lies are still lies, even when being denied in bold. One gets the impression that Cochrane is *not* interested in creating new knowledge but only in protecting its own people and brand. What was it Cochrane wanted from me? That I should work for Cochrane incognito, without using the letter-head or name? That I should do research but not publish or publicise the results unless they had first been approved by Wilson? It surely looked that way.

The strong language continued:

"It is about a long-term pattern of behaviour that we say is totally, and utterly, at variance with the principles and governance of the Cochrane Collaboration. This is about integrity, accountability and leadership."

Antes wrote in an email that this statement was incredibly ignorant and arrogant. It suggested that many highly respected people were too stupid to have recognised my bad behaviour for many years. At the AGM, he jokingly said that he had been a witness of that bad behavior for 25 years (without noticing it). Later, [he stated](#) that, the board's conduct in a deleterious way, confirmed the allegations that Cochrane was departing from its objectives and undermining fundamental principles such as transparency and integrity at management level.

"In March this year, we received three complaints about an individual. These were not the first complaints that had ever been received. In fact, the earliest recorded goes back to 2003. Many have been dealt with over the years. Many disputes have arisen. Formal letters have been exchanged. Promises have been made. And broken. Some disputes have been resolved, some have not."

The board's statement was a [masterpiece in manipulation](#) and they forgot to say that Counsel had exonerated me. I explained in my report to Counsel that the "complaints" since 2003 were unjustified and were about the complainants trying to protect their financial or other interests. When scientists challenge the status quo with good science and face "complaints," it should be seen as a badge of honour showing that the scientists have integrity and do not try to arrive at politically correct results. Also considering Counsel's report, it was very misleading to say that I had broken promises. But as the audience didn't know any of this, they were gullible victims for Burton's horrendous manipulations.

"The individual then made serious allegations against one of the Senior Management Team and shared those with the Board. We seemed to be in an impossible situation."

The board knew this statement was misleading. I did not raise allegations but described facts in my email to the board, and Counsel did not find anything wrong with that.

“The trustees reviewed the lawyer’s report ... and all the material related to the recently published paper ... looking across a broad range of behaviours, the board came to a decision to invoke Article 5.2.1. relating to termination of membership. This was not unanimous.”

This was mendacious. The board did not consider all the material related to our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review, and they needed to hide what the “recently published paper” was about because they argued that my expulsion was *not* about my criticism of a Cochrane review. They also hid that Burton refused to send Wilson’s exoneration of his own employee to the board despite my request; they did not tell people that the voting was very narrow, six to five; and they did not say that the board failed miserably in its duties because they had not read the material sent to them.

Looking across a broad range of undefined behaviours is so vague that anyone can be expelled. People started worrying that they might be next in line to be expelled if they didn’t follow Wilson’s party line.

Burton showed a slide that said, “The independent review did not exonerate the individual.”

A legal review paid for by one of the sides in a dispute and offered incorrect, flawed and even fraudulent information only from that side cannot be said to be independent. And the use of the phrase “did not exonerate” is highly manipulative, as it falsely insinuated that Counsel found me guilty of wrongdoing.

After Burton’s hate speech, we expected we could ask questions. Not so. There was an intermezzo about financial issues before the question and answer session. Koster chaired it. The first question was about science. Already after the second question, Koster said there was no more time for questions. This was disgraceful. Previous AGMs had a lot of time for questions, and this is the only time in a year that the members can ask questions of the Governing Board. On top of this, a session that was to follow had been cancelled, so there was plenty of time before the Gala dinner close by.

Cochrane had become a dictatorship where dissent was not allowed and where no one could question the Great Leader about whether his victims had had a fair trial.

The audience protested loudly and pressured Koster to allow more questions.

The defamatory claims about my behavior were so shocking that they paralysed people in the audience. Neither my deputy, nor my other chief physician, Klaus Munkholm, rose to my defense although they had agreed to do this, and although I signaled to them that they should rise from their chairs. It was immensely disappointing, also considering what I had done for them and the research environment I had created. All of us loved going to work every day. I didn’t know that Jørgensen had betrayed me. He was afraid of losing his job and had been seen in amicable conversations with Wilson and Bero.

Demasi was also in the audience. She was familiar with these kinds of processes after having worked in academia, media and politics. She approached the microphone and challenged the board members.

“There have been some very serious allegations made about this particular individual, of ‘seriously bad behavior’ without a fair opportunity for that person to contest these allegations and defend himself. So, is it possible you could expand on this and allow that individual to defend himself in an auditorium of his peers to avoid any allegation of defamation?”

Burton responded:

“The issue of fair opportunity is one that is often, it’s always fair to ask about, about fair opportunities and I can assure you that we will give ... well, there’s been plenty of opportunity

actually already, but we're happy to consult and see if there is another, another forum in which an opportunity needs to be given. But the board had a very large amount of information on which to make its decision. Thank you".

I considered this mendacious. The board had not read this information, which was seriously misleading as well, and Burton had likely planted "evidence." This would not have been accepted in a court of law.

Burton called for another question, but Demasi interjected.

"I understand, but I just have a question about the procedural fairness of that process. I understand that the individual was given less than 5 minutes to state a defense, before he was asked to recuse himself from the room before deliberations occurred. He was not provided access or assistance to legal advice. Can you comment on the lack of procedural fairness offered to this individual?"

Burton replied:

"Yes, I have no comment on those, your assertions, at the beginning of that statement. But I can assure you, and I can assure everybody in this room, and I can look every single person in their eye in this room, we can all look you in the eye and say there has been a completely independent and fair, transparent process. The whole thing, the Cochrane Collaboration has lawyers to advise us, they have advised us every single step of the way and will continue to do so because the collaboration needs to act legally at all times. It has done so, and will continue to do so but on the specifics you asked, 'no comment.' And I'm sorry, I'd like to be able to comment."

I took the microphone and said that all these allegations about bad behavior were false and that the lawyer's report exonerated me about breaking the Spokesperson Policy.

"This will not be over, in this Annual General Meeting, you have just made it worse. I hoped that you would come to your senses. This is very bad for Cochrane, and it will be even worse in the future. It's a show trial completely from beginning to end; you took none of my comments into account. It didn't mean anything. The verdict was already dictated from the beginning and I'm sure it came from our CEO, so why don't we come with a vote of no confidence for the whole remnant of the board and get a new provisional board in three months and start all over again. Otherwise, Cochrane will suffer a lot more. I will survive, but I'm worried about Cochrane."

Burton chastised me saying that I made a serious allegation against the CEO.

I responded:

"I will come back, probably with legal help, and there is also the Charity Commission. I have documented serious mismanagement at the top of the Cochrane Collaboration, and I think the Charity Commission would be interested in this, frankly."

I talked to many people after this. They were all in shock. This was not the Cochrane they so much treasured. Very, very far from it.

The next day, Koster repeated some of the board's untruthful statements in an interview<sup>68</sup> that I [have commented](#) upon. Journalist Ivan Oransky published Koster's claims and did not bother to fact check them. She accused me of having repeatedly misused my centre's letterhead to espouse personal views. She back-pedaled from this falsehood on 3 October when she and Burton sent a [letter](#) to my private home address about the reasons for my expulsion.

---

<sup>68</sup> Oransky I, Marcus A. [Cochrane ousted researcher over improper use of letterhead, board co-chair says](#). 2018; 28 Sept.

Koster also argued that it is not a Cochrane view to ask a funder about deaths in a study and said that the decision to expel me was not based on my criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review, which was also false.

Koster delivered the self-serving argument that, “The vast majority of responses I’ve received have been very thankful that actions are being taken, and that this kind of behavior should not be permitted.” This was cherry picking. We did not know what all the 30,000 people in Cochrane thought about the issues but thousands of those were angry (see next chapter).

Two days later after the AGM, the UK Council for Evidence-based Psychiatry [expressed](#) what many felt:

“Prof Peter C. Gøtzsche is known throughout the medical world as a tireless advocate for research excellence, a fearless critic of scientific misconduct, and a powerful opponent of the corruption of research by industry interests. His meticulous integrity in demanding the highest standards from his colleagues has won him the admiration of patients, researchers, doctors, campaigners and advocacy groups worldwide. We believe it is deeply regrettable that members of the Governing Board should have voted (by a majority of only 6 to 5) to expel Peter, especially since no objective evidence has been provided to support the decision they have made.”

#### **14 The following months**

I had a week to appeal. On first thought, I did not want to appeal because my supporters on the board had already resigned and the same people who voted to expel me would again sit in judgement of my appeal. This construct gives connotations to regimes we abhor. I nevertheless appealed to show how unfair Cochrane “processes” were and to see how the board would react. I sent a [22-page letter](#) with 9 appendices, which ended with a summary:

A group of trusted people, external to Cochrane, should set up an independent committee of people who have had nothing to do with Cochrane, but who have experience in mediation, law, medical science and medical editing, who should judge my case carefully, with no haste.

Alternatively, the board should reinstitute my membership of the Cochrane Collaboration, acknowledging the gross injustice and defamation I have been exposed to.

In any case, I must be given the opportunity to participate in any deliberations, also oral ones, like in a court case, and to contest any explicit reasons for my expulsion on 13 September.

According to the Freedom of Information Act, I request a copy of all recordings made at the 13 September meeting by board members, and the written minutes and drafts for minutes as well, as I suspect there are more violations of the rules than those I have outlined in this appeal.

I asked for the evidence the board had used to verify that I had breached the Trustee Code of Conduct or clause 5.2.1 (about harming the charity or bringing it into disrepute), and whether the board found it acceptable that the explanations given about why I was expelled had the character of a moving target (Burton gave new reasons at the AGM, including bad behaviour, harassment and personal attacks, without specifying what that was, and which I had no knowledge about).

I explained that I had written in my report to Counsel that it was preliminary because I needed more documentation before I could provide a final report; that Counsel asserted in his report that he had not had sufficient time to write it; and that he had therefore outlined this plan:

Counsel delivers his initial report in advance of the board meeting on 13 September; the board considers the report; Counsel responds to questions and finalises his report; and the board then considers and debates the final report.

I had therefore trusted that no decisions would be made at that meeting, and that the process would take some time. However, the board disregarded Counsel's advice, which contradicted Burton's numerous assertions that, "We followed the advice of the lawyers at all times."

I concluded tentatively that Cochrane wanted to expel me because of my fight for academic freedom in Cochrane and my repeated criticism of the drug industry and the establishment, e.g. a specialty like psychiatry. I noted that the current Cochrane leadership tried to avoid challenging established dogma, although the basis for founding Cochrane 25 years ago was exactly that: to challenge established dogma.

I stated that the evidence I had provided disqualified Burton to sit in judgement of my appeal and that the other board members were also disqualified, given that they arrived at a verdict based on flawed evidence and under the leadership of a chair who seemed to be very dictatorial and did his utmost to disgrace me and pervert the course of justice during the board meeting and at the AGM.

I explained at length why Counsel, in contrast to the board's view, had exonerated me and where his report was in error. I also commented on Wilson's exoneration of Lasserson who wrote the Cochrane editorial about the HPV vaccine review, and I concluded this meant Wilson could not criticise and discipline me based on the Spokesperson Policy.

I mentioned several important incidents from the board meeting the resigned members had told me about, including my strong suspicion that Burton had orchestrated the letters of complaint related to the HPV affair; that threats had been made that anyone who disputed the board's decision would be removed from the board; that Cochrane's CEO had threatened the board; that a board member had reminded the others that the CEO could sue them; and that a kind of lynch mood was created in the room, although people were aware that the meeting was being recorded.

None of this was respected of course and I did not receive any meaningful reply.

### **Untrue board statements and calls for an independent investigation**

On 3 and 4 October, several important things happened. I received the [official reasons](#) for my expulsion in a posted letter; complaints were sent to the board about the process; and the board lied to Cochrane members at a webinar about why they had expelled me.

The co-chairs' letter was meaningless. They claimed I had breached the Collaboration Agreement, which was not true (Council had misunderstood this) and had "broken the spirit of the Spokesperson Policy if not the letter." This is the first and only time that the co-chairs of the board admitted that I had not broken the Spokesperson Policy. In a letter marked "Addressee Only. Strictly Private & Confidential, NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR DISSEMINATION." Their mockery and disdain for other people was limitless.

The board included events going back to 2003 although Counsel had found this inappropriate, and they claimed that I had undermined Cochrane's reputation and the functioning and work of the board, the Central Executive Team and the organisation as a whole. A huge mouthful, and a huge lie. My actions had never harmed Cochrane, quite the contrary.

The board admitted that our criticism of the HPV vaccine review was a reason for expelling me, although it had fiercely denied this on all previous occasions: “A new issue has arisen even since the Independent Review was commenced (in relation to the HPV paper).” Furthermore, the board criticised my conduct *after* I was expelled, and did not acknowledge that I had I right to defend myself against serious defamation committed by the same board. This was a catch-22 situation.

On 4 October, the German Network for Evidence-based Medicine [wrote to Wilson and Tovey](#) that they were deeply concerned about what had happened. They noticed a significant lack of transparency and did not understand how bad behaviour could be the reason to “expel one of the most respected scientists and Cochrane founders, Peter C. Gøtzsche, who was chosen to be member of the board by voting in a democratic election ... We highly esteem the contribution of Peter C. Gøtzsche to the development of Cochrane and his support for our objectives to implement evidence-based medicine. Members of our network have voted for Peter C. Gøtzsche to become a leading member of the board because he is considered a person who is known for free speech and a strong character, for courage and his merits to a non-corruptible medicine. We do not understand how a minority of the board members can now be authorized to expel him ... Gøtzsche is one of the key players in a trustful future development of Cochrane ... an organisation that lives from transparency. We miss this transparency and are deeply concerned about the democratic basis of this decision. We strongly recommend rethinking the decision and especially to transparently unveil all arguments which have guided the Governing Board’s decision.”

In their reply, the co-chairs [repeated many of their falsehoods](#):

“Your letter contains a number of inaccuracies. It also draws conclusions on the basis of limited, biased evidence. Given your network’s position in promoting the teaching and practice of evidence-based medicine we hope that, moving forward, you will consider the entire body of evidence pertaining to this matter.”

There are no inaccuracies in the Network’s letter, and it was not the Network but the board that had disseminated incomplete and biased information. The board had censored the information, but the Network had access to unbiased information because I had published it on my website, including those documents the board did not want anyone to see, like Counsel’s STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL report.

“It appears that you condone the behaviour of Professor Peter Gøtzsche. We respectfully suggest that the behaviours he demonstrated both before 13th September 2018, when our Board first considered them, and especially subsequently (he has continued to disseminate shockingly defamatory materials) are not behaviours that would be found acceptable to the Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf, Universität Witten, Universität Hamburg, Martin Luther University, or other esteemed institutions. We should like to understand why then would they be acceptable to the EBM Netzwerk? ... We are disappointed if your organisation, and those who fund you, believe that high esteem is more important than respectful, collaborative behaviour that clearly serves the best interests of Cochrane.”

The co-chairs’ arrogance, disdain, and hubris were second to none. There had been absolutely no “respectful, collaborative behaviour that clearly serves the best interests of Cochrane” on the part of Cochrane’s CEO, the co-chairs and the remaining four members of the board.

On 30 October, the Network sent an [open letter to Wilson](#):

“We are still or even more disappointed because the response does not contain any facts but keeps repeating the nebulous intimations regarding Peter Gøtzsche’s ‘behaviour’ without presenting any evidence. This does not go along well with the quite impertinent incrimination of

the German Network of Evidence-based Medicine ... Ms. Koster and Mr. Burton accuse us of being inaccurate and drawing conclusions on the basis of limited, biased evidence. From our point of view, it is quite evident that the governing board is not presenting any evidence for its accusations but keeps reiterating untransparent and incomprehensible statements which endanger the trustworthiness of Cochrane and damage the reputation of the organisation. Once more, the spirit of Cochrane and its excellent standing require open communication and disclosure of the reasons why Peter Gøtzsche has been expelled from the Cochrane Governing Board, and furthermore why the other board members have not yet resigned to open up the opportunity for new elections and strengthen the democratic basis of Cochrane. We completely miss the spirit of Cochrane in the handling of this affair. We fear that Cochrane's reputation is at risk of severe damage."

All 31 Centre Directors in Spain and Latin America [called for an independent investigation](#) of the process around my expulsion. They sent their email to Cochrane's CEO and the Governing Board:

We have doubts that the process has been sufficiently appropriate and coherent with the principles of Cochrane ... Any entity (e.g. a political party, a trade union, a religious organisation, the university) have well-established internal mechanisms that guarantee an objective analysis of the accusations and defenses, as well as the right to appeal with the necessary guarantees to a neutral group or commission different from the one involved in the conflict. These mechanisms and the associated processes should be transparent and auditable ... Expelling a member from an organisation can never become ... a summary process that lacks the necessary transparency, and this is ... how we and many other people in our organisation and outside of it have perceived the resolution of this conflict ... We do 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 ... We propose:

1 That the Governing Board calls immediate elections to renew the set of vacant positions in the Board, and thus give the opportunity to incorporate other perspectives and sensitivities to the government of the organisation, and particularly, to the management of this issue.

2 That the new board appoints an ad-hoc commission, without the participation of any person who has been directly involved in the conflict, so that it independently reviews all the actions related to this conflict and establishes the possible responsibilities that will then be assumed consequently.

3 That the report of the mentioned commission is known and discussed by the different Cochrane members and entities, so that the conclusions derived from this discussion can be incorporated into the regulations and processes of the organisation: guarantees and rules to objectively assess possible faults and respect the presumption of innocence, the right to defense, the equality of opportunities, and the impartiality of those who qualify the alleged faults and apply proportional sanctions to the infractions, if any.

We would appreciate that you consider it and share it with as many people as you feel appropriate.

It is noteworthy that this letter came from all the Cochrane Directors in Latin America and Spain. During his hate speech, Burton said that, "We know bad behaviour when we see it." In Latin America, they know a dictatorship when they see it. My colleagues did the right thing: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" (Desmond Tutu).

The Governing Board [used five pages](#) to pave the way to its conclusion:

“We believe it is not in the charity's best interests to undertake another independent review.”  
They should have written:

“We believe it is not in the board’s best interests to undertake another independent review because we would not survive it.”

On 5 October, psychiatrist David Healy [compared Cochrane to a cult](#), “whose leadership dictate what can and cannot be said. A Cult, who in cutting off one of their only colourful figures, will be viewed as a bunch of grey men ... A Cult whose value to science has plummeted to rock bottom.”

He wondered how Cochrane can justify tolerating 25 years' worth of reviews based on ghostwritten articles and no scrutiny of trial data due to lack of access: “Surely, this has been as deep a betrayal of the core Cochrane mission as it is possible to imagine.”

In his article, “[How Cochrane is doing pharma a good turn](#),” Tom Jefferson shared Healy’s concerns. Cochrane was willing to expel from its ranks a vocal industry critic despite the predictable and sustained backlash, and the organisation promoted a false sense of plurality when in fact the information released from Cochrane was now tightly controlled. This is how industry operates. At present, Cochrane was performing useful functions for industry by creating a roadmap for the publication of commercial trials and then magnifying the effects of bias by including those trials too readily in its reviews. Cochrane’s failure to officially and actively push for open access to regulatory data and their inclusion in its reviews, or to address in a coherent, decisive way the underreporting of harms, aligned it with the aims of industry.

### **Cochrane webinars lied about the reasons for my expulsion**

On 4 October, Cochrane’s CEO and Governing Board held three [webinars for Cochrane members](#) where they lied profusely when they tried to explain why I had been expelled.

Although the Latin American centre directors had encouraged the Cochrane leaders to share their message “with as many people as you feel appropriate,” their statement was not even mentioned at the webinars. The webinars were accompanied by [slides](#) that were highly untruthful:

“A consistent placing of his own interests above those of Cochrane.”

The board propagated this statement in bad faith because I had explained in my report to Counsel that it is a false dichotomy. The fact that I am a respected researcher who publishes research that is useful for patients played a major role for my success with getting Danish Cochrane activities on the government’s budget.

“Multiple warnings were given & conversations took place in concerted attempts to deal constructively with the issues.”

Publicly disagreeing with someone’s science is hardly a basis for a complaint about my “behaviour.” Wilson gave me multiple warnings about my alleged breaches of his Spokesperson Policy, but as I never breached this policy, his allegations were void.

“A repeated representation of personal views as those of Cochrane despite requests and promises not to do so.”

This was a gigantic lie. No one had ever honestly confused my views with those of Cochrane as an organisation, and the board had not explained why it ignored its own legal report that exonerated me.

“Multiple complaints to Cochrane over a number of years.”

That the board mentioned this after all my explanations illustrated the total moral collapse of the Cochrane leadership.

“Serious, defamatory and outrageous allegations against Cochrane colleagues - and publicly.”

These were not allegations or defamation, but facts, and I did not go public before the board had expelled me in a show trial, which it was my right to do as an act of self-defence.

“As a member of the Governing Board, a serious breach of the Trustees' Code of Conduct.”

At no point had Cochrane or Counsel demonstrated to me that I had breached this Code.

“Cochrane welcomes and supports academic criticism as part of our culture.”

As I have documented, this is clearly *not* the case.

“As a trustee and Centre Director, Professor Gøtzsche had a special duty of care to act in the best interests of the organisation when making criticisms of Cochrane Reviews.”

This was difficult to reconcile. Our criticisms were always scientifically well founded and whether one is allowed to criticise should have nothing to do with the number of Cochrane stripes one has on the shoulder. Some board members were scientists, and it was unreasonable to expect them to behave differently to other scientists. The board also contradicted its claim about welcoming academic criticism.

“With his critique of the HPV vaccine review, published in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine without prior warning, he chose not to act in Cochrane's best interests. This is an example of bad behaviour, but it is not the reason for termination of membership.”

This comment is untruthful. The board knew perfectly well that we warned Cochrane multiple times, and that I could not warn about our publication because I was on holiday. Moreover, our criticism of the Cochrane HPV vaccine review *did* play an important role for my expulsion.

“The Board's decision had nothing to do with conflicts of interest or Cochrane's determination to have robust COI policies and apply them properly.”

Board co-chair Martin Burton had a huge conflict of interest when making a decision about my fate.

“The Board rejects any allegations of closer links to commercial organizations that would threaten Cochrane's independence and credibility. There is no evidence for this because it is not true.”

Blanket denial of something doesn't mean that it isn't true. There might or might not be close links between Cochrane leaders and the drug industry, and if there were, this is not something people usually reveal. Their actions were difficult to explain unless there was some dependence, which many people suspected there was. This warranted an investigation.

“Professor Gøtzsche's behaviour would not be allowed in any of the organisations by whom we are employed.”

My behaviour was welcomed in the organisations that employed me, the Copenhagen Hospital Corporation and the University of Copenhagen, which, in contrast to Cochrane, do not accept scientific censorship. My behaviour was appreciated to such an extent that the Danish Minister of Health told me at a meeting I had with her and the Directors of the National Board of Health and of the Danish Medicines Agency on 14 August 2018 that she appreciated that I challenged dogma. Cochrane should have been proud of having a person like me in the organisation. My priority was to be a champion for those in the community who didn't have a voice. This was much appreciated, particularly by psychiatric patients, and strongly recommended by Cochrane.

“Clarifying and enforcing expected levels of behaviour by Cochrane members - particularly its leaders - is critical to building a culture of trust, openness, respect and professionalism.”

The board did not clarify anything. They confused the issues and lied about them; they totally lost the trust of Cochrane members; and they were disrespectful and unprofessional towards me and other members.

“The Board followed due process during its investigation.”

This is blatantly false, and the immediate resignation of four board members in protest demonstrated this.

“It also maintained duty of care to Professor Gøtzsche, even when he broke confidentiality and made defamatory statements against named individuals.”

As already noted, it was only *after* my expulsion on 13 September and *after* the board had disseminated outrageous lies and defamatory statements about me on 17 September that I made public statements about named individuals and they were not defamatory. Moreover, there was a public interest in knowing about the issues that overrode any concerns about confidentiality, and I had made it clear that I waived my right to confidentiality.

“Cochrane's Central team is in contact with the Nordic Cochrane Centre's host institution and major funder to protect future support to the Centre and its employees; and to the three review groups also supported by the grant.”

This demonstrated the extent of Wilson's spite. As explained above, no one on the board knew if the funding I had obtained was linked to me personally and would disappear if I was expelled from Cochrane. If so, Wilson would have created a major blood bath where about 50 people would lose their job and Cochrane would lose 3 of its 52 review groups.

“Any group that uses Cochrane's name and logo must be accountable to Cochrane, follow Cochrane policies and practices, and act at all times in the best interests of the organisation and the benefit of the public. We will protect and defend Cochrane's organisational integrity fiercely.”

A commentator wrote that these slides gave the impression that a main goal of the webinar was to discipline all the members of Cochrane.

In their verbal introduction to the webinar, the board gave as reasons for my expulsion that I had used my Centre's letterhead for expert testimony in a homicide trial (see page 27), and that I had criticised Cochrane editors in 2015 in relation to the Maudsley debate (see page 78). These reasons were used to show that I had undermined the credibility of Cochrane.

This was also mendacious. [Counsel exonerated me in both cases](#), but the board kept ignoring this: “My conclusion is the same in relation to the expert report and the subsequent complaint against Professor Loonen in the Dutch proceedings. PG was there plainly not speaking about ‘Cochrane-related issues.’ I do not think it can be said that he was speaking officially on behalf of Cochrane.”

The board noted that Cochrane didn't endorse my views. Which views? The board had not seen my internal expert report to the court, which was evidence-based, but was blindly making a statement, based on no information, just false assumptions. Furthermore, there were no views to be endorsed by Cochrane because it was not called to present expert testimony in court.

As for the Maudsley debate, Counsel did not find it served any useful purpose or would be fair to me to go back three years in time. Further, no one doubted that what I presented during the debate and in my subsequent publication represented my personal views. As can be seen in [my report to Counsel](#), this was the only time I had ever done anything, for which the Cochrane leaders could criticise me, but actually, it was Cochrane's Editor-in-Chief and Deputy CEO David Tovey who should be blamed, not me. He had no research experience in psychiatry and provoked me by abusing his high nominal position in Cochrane to disavow me, indeed as first author on the letter, so that no one would miss the point.

Gartlehner wrote to the other three resigned board members and to Jefferson, Demasi, my deputy and me: “I think the reasons for these speculations [about why I was expelled] are that the

Cochrane statement is extremely vague. Expelling a member is a very drastic action, and some people think that a criminal offense must be the reason for it.”

Many researchers wrote similar things to me. The overwhelming impression was that all the secrecy was about protecting the privacy of the “victims” who were abused by my “bad behaviour.” But I was the only victim.

One wrote: “I saw this as Martin's clever way of intimidating people into not supporting you - you don't want to support someone who has committed sexual harassment or something similar. Martin is a scary person.”

Another wrote: “I thought already at the AGM that Burton's slide and speech were very explicit in their insinuation. When you read the whole paragraph, the #metoo insinuation is bent in neon.”

On 23 September 2018, Michael Baum from one of America's leading litigation firms, Baum & Hedlund in Los Angeles, wrote to a colleague of mine: “Do you have some intel into what Cochrane thinks Peter's bad behaviour was? Was in the process of including him and Tom Jefferson to be experts for Gardasil [an HPV vaccine] cases, but then all this crud flared up.”

My colleague replied: “There is no serious bad behaviour – it's just a case of PG not singing from the same hymn sheet as the CEO of Cochrane who seems to be widely regarded as an anal asshole.”

Baum: “So, no skeleton or sex/finance/corruption type stuff is lurking under the accusation of ‘bad behaviour’?”

“It will leave a lot of people thinking Peter is a Harvey Weinstein. I think you could make a good case that there are lots of people - media, lawyers, professional organisations - who will simply remove Peter from their lists of people to consider for media, legal, clinical or research work on the basis of this slur. If they don't have someone to check with - like me in this case - they will just erase Peter's name on a risk management basis.”

A breast cancer patient, a long-time contributor to Cochrane, wrote to Cochrane headquarters that it sounded as if I had raped somebody.

### **Hammerstein's brilliant analysis of the show trial and Cochrane**

Since Wilson was destroying Cochrane, I did what I could to change the direction of travel in Cochrane. As soon as I had been elected to the board, I persuaded my good friend David Hammerstein to run for the board as an external member.

It started seven years earlier. A Danish Member of the European Parliament, Margrete Auken (The Greens), phoned me and asked if I would give a talk about genetic screening in Strasbourg. I knew very little about this and suggested I could talk about screening for cancer, regular health checks, and my success with opening up the archives of the European Medicines Agency after I had complained to the European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros.<sup>69</sup> I also asked if she could arrange a meeting with Diamandouros while I was there, which she did. Auken and I also became good friends.

In the announcement of my talk, *Screening for cancer and general health checks*, which I held on 25 November 2010, there was nothing about our access to data at the agency, but it became very important that I mentioned this in passing by the end of my talk. There were only about ten people in the audience, but one was the German doctor Peter Liese from the Christian Democratic

---

<sup>69</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Jørgensen AW. Opening up data at the European Medicines Agency. *BMJ* 2011;342:d2686.

Union (CDU), part of the European People's Party. I had several meetings with politicians in Strasbourg, also with Liese, who was very interested in my ideas about clinical trials. I wrote a paper for him that I published.<sup>70</sup> In it, I gave many examples that selective reporting of trial data, or no reporting at all, had led to tens of thousands of deaths that could have been avoided.



Margrete Auken



Peter Liese

This led to my regular appearance in the European Parliament in Bruxelles where I cooperated closely with Auken and Hammerstein, a US citizen who emigrated to Spain when he was young and later became elected for Spain to the European Parliament. Hammerstein had become a lobbyist for the public and was Senior Policy Advocate for the large Trans Atlantic Consumer Dialogue. A year later he invited me to give a talk in Parliament, *Strengthening and opening up EU's health research*, [which I published](#) in a medical journal. It ended this way:

“If you disagree with what I have said about data sharing, then please consider this: If commercial or academic success depends on withholding data that are important for rational decision making by physicians, patients, and governments, then there is something fundamentally wrong with our priorities in health care.”

I believe Hammerstein was the most intelligent person on Cochrane's Governing Board, and he also had by far the greatest political experience. He could therefore have been of tremendous value for Cochrane, but with Mark Wilson at the rudder, Hammerstein was “too big.”

At Hammerstein's first board meeting, in Cape Town in September 2017, just after he had been elected, co-chair Martin Burton took him aside when there were no witnesses and told him that five board members wanted to kick him out and that if he didn't withdraw voluntarily, an emergency meeting would be set up to remove him before his assignment became officially announced one or two days later.

In my reply to the co-chairs' plan, nominally about resolving the conflicts between Wilson and me, about seven months later, I noted that it was not appropriate or democratic, and had caused great distress on several occasions, when a co-chair took board members aside, one by one, with no witnesses, trying to convince them that they should do otherwise than they had planned.

Hammerstein refused, and several board members became very angry about Burton's intervention. The board had elected Hammerstein and, although I was the one who had persuaded him to volunteer for the board despite his many other commitments, Burton did not

---

<sup>70</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Why we need easy access to all data from all clinical trials and how to accomplish it](#). *Trials* 2011;12:249.

even inform me about his intervention. Considering Hammerstein's qualifications, it was a sign of a sick culture at the top in Cochrane that this could happen.

Board member Catherine Marshall had sent a letter to the board where she complained about Hammerstein and me in a highly derogatory fashion, using ad hominem arguments. Hammerstein responded politely that, "It is a serious mistake and could be very negative for any organization to shift discussion from substance and content to psychology or personal styles. It often reflects a great resistance to openly discuss policies and to consider any substantive change, personalizing the issues instead of debating them with arguments ... It is usually not advisable for the cohesion of a group to label certain points of view (usually in agreement with the status quo) 'wise', 'professional', 'positive', 'legal' and 'collaborative' while disqualifying other opinions. This is not usually the way to promote an enrichment of an organization with new information and ideas."

Hammerstein and I should have resigned from the board after these experiences in Cape Town, as it was so obviously dysfunctional and hostage to petty gripes from members who refused to debate issues on their merit. Wilson's grip on power was just too strong to change.

Just after we had returned from Cape Town, I [published a piece](#) about what it was like to be on the Governing Board. I wrote that Nelson Mandela was a great moral leader and that my vision for Cochrane was that it would become the world's moral leader in a healthcare dominated by politics and conflicts of interest: "Cochrane must incessantly point out that we need a better world where the clinical trials are not designed, carried out and analysed by those who have a direct financial interest in the outcome, and where the data are manipulated or hidden if they do not please the sponsor. Up to now, Cochrane has been close to invisible in a political context. This should change. We could be a strong political voice."

How naïve I was. Cochrane never advocated for this, and with Wilson as CEO, Cochrane became the opposite of a moral leader.

On 8 October 2018, Hammerstein published a [brilliant analysis](#) on the *No Gracias* website, which illustrated just that. Here are some highlights.

The crisis is about credibility. The focus on one individual's behaviour is being used to avoid a serious debate on the future strategy and policies of the organisation. What has moved the Cochrane leadership to take the exceptional decision to expel Peter Gøtzsche are his very visible actions in the fields of science, policy and medical ethics. The deliberate confusion of affiliation with representation has been used by the Cochrane leadership to attack and try to erode Gøtzsche's prestige related to his scientific and policy positions.

The paradigm held by the CEO deems that the preservation of a unified "brand" and a more centralized and authoritarian "corporate image" is of the utmost importance for the financial growth and stability of the Cochrane central office. The scientific, financial and policy independence of Cochrane centres outside of the UK could pose a threat to the consolidation of this common "brand". The present executive team and Governing Board presidency are openly reticent of contact with most public health NGOs and against Cochrane leaders taking clear public positions on transparency, open data, open science or medical innovation policies.

The other paradigm stresses support for much stronger policies to avoid biases and conflicts of interest in Cochrane reviews, and much greater visibility of Cochrane in policy debates. What is essential for this group is where the "evidence" comes from, who pays for it, and if all the clinical evidence is publicly available or not.

The big winner in this conflict has been the pharmaceutical industry, having succeeded in weakening the voice of one of its greatest critics and having consolidated a Cochrane leadership closer to industrial interests with fewer audible critical voices.

The Cochrane leadership has often shown disdain and impatience with any criticism of their work or proposals. What is especially grievous is that the Governing Board does not govern. It seems to be considered by the central executive team to be a mere rubber-stamp for their decisions. Only the two co-chairs of the Governing Board seem to have some fluid input into the decision-making process. They have never had a public word of discrepancy with anything presented to the board by the CEO.

Another example of this top-down control obsession of the Cochrane leadership is the “webinar” organised last week to “explain” the current crisis sparked by the expulsion of Peter Gøtzsche. No convincing evidence was provided. All the microphones of the participants were muted. They were not allowed to speak, only to listen passively, and even their written questions sent to the CEO and the co-chairs were “re-interpreted” and formulated in different terms.

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. No time has been given to establish an independent committee of conflict made up of people from outside of Cochrane’s main institutions. Every step of democratic guarantees that is common in most large organisations has been ignored in this case with the objective of the rapid exclusion and tarnishing of Peter Gøtzsche.

Peter Gøtzsche has had no chance to defend himself in person before the board. He was expelled without even knowing what he was accused of, aside from the generic accusation of causing “disrepute” to Cochrane. The only accusation that had been made clearly, that he had violated the Spokesperson Policy, was not at all confirmed by the so-called “independent Counsel” that found the Spokesperson Policy “ambiguous” and “open to different interpretations.” In fact, the so-called “independent Counsel” did not reach any clear conclusions nor did it make any recommendations for disciplinary action against Gøtzsche despite this being requested from the Cochrane leadership. The ambiguous phrase used publicly by the Cochrane leadership that the open-ended counsel report – “did not exonerate”- falsely insinuated that Gøtzsche was found guilty of wrongdoing on the part of the Counsel, but that did not happen. It is disgraceful that the Cochrane leadership has used such personal defamation tactics without any proof nor transparency.

What is totally unacceptable and probably illegal is that dark and ominous insinuations have been made about Peter Gøtzsche, backed up with absolutely no evidence. Concerning his personal “behaviour,” the Cochrane leadership has publicly and privately used the language of the “me-too” movement and “zero-tolerance” of sexual harassment and abuse.

The exclusion of Peter Gøtzsche and the “suggested” resignation of another four members of the board was a well-planned, predetermined operation for the elimination of all the critical voices from the Governing Board. Shortly before the Governing Board vote that expelled Gøtzsche, one of the six members of the board that voted in favour of the expulsion stated that all the members of the Board were obliged to publicly defend the decision and not reveal the details of the close vote that was about to take place. What was also sought by the Cochrane leadership was a concealment of what had happened in the process, debate and vote.

At the Governing Board meeting a year ago, in September 2017, Peter Gøtzsche proposed a text, with the support of a number of other members of the Board, to substantially strengthen Cochrane's conflict of interest policy, which today allows up to half of the authors of reviews to have conflicts of interests with the company that makes the product they are evaluating. This proposal was met with considerable resistance and outright discomfort from the Cochrane leadership; one of the Governing Board leaders even said that "without conflicted reviewers we'll find no-one to do our reviews". Over the next year no progress was made on this conflict of interest proposal and a long, torturous bureaucratic procedure was suggested by the co-chairs with the intention of burying the whole issue.

It is no coincidence that Peter Gøtzsche's expulsion took place when he had been insisting for over a year on a new, much stricter conflict of interest policy for Cochrane.

Over the past year, the CEO has insisted that they "are not ready" for taking public positions, that it is not a present priority and he expressed in a written reply the need to plan advocacy carefully based on the "products" (systematic reviews) Cochrane develops. When one top member of the Cochrane team was asked about Cochrane's relationship with the major public health NGOs that often present proposals for access to medicines and new open innovation models before the World Health Organization, he/she said that these organizations held viewpoints "too radical" for Cochrane.

What is evident to any observer is that over the past few years Cochrane has not considered it important to influence public policy in areas extremely relevant and necessary for the production of "better evidence."

As John Ioannidis has said "evidence-based medicine" is misused and abused by eminence-based experts and conflicted stakeholders who want to support their views and their products, without caring much about the integrity, transparency, and unbiasedness of science. Some observers feel that many Cochrane reviews are being "misused and abused" in this very manner by the pharmaceutical industry. Especially criticised is the production of many Cochrane reviews based on journal articles without attention given to much of the clinical data which is often either hidden, censored or manipulated by the industry sponsors of the trials.

It has become evident that the present Cochrane leadership has sometimes chosen to ignore overt industry manipulation of clinical evidence and has occasionally even fallen in the trap of serving as "an industry advertisement tool" with a shiny Cochrane stamp on it that lends this publicity "independent" credibility.

Peter Gøtzsche and others in Cochrane have defended the idea that evidence generated by companies with a vested financial interest in the marketing of the "reliability" of that evidence is a great problem for medical researchers and the carrying out of systematic reviews. Most of the Cochrane leadership thinks and acts otherwise in the way it treats the evidence usually used as the "raw material" for systematic reviews. If that is added to the fact of a weak conflict of interest policy that allows up to half of reviewers to have conflicts of interest, Cochrane has a growing credibility problem.

### **Jos Verbeek, editor of the Cochrane Work group, establishes a counter movement**

Cochrane never organised anything suggested by Hammerstein, the Iberoamerican centre directors, or others. Nothing was done. The Great Leader had obtained what he wanted. But the price was high.

On 15 October 2018, Jos Verbeek, editor of the Cochrane Work group, [wrote on the group's website](#):

“In all their statements the Governing Board has performed a methodical character assassination of Peter Gøtzsche 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 ...

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’ ... has further increased the unsafe climate that characterises Cochrane. You better not speak out because it might have consequences ... all communication in Cochrane is top-down and there is no forum for discussion between members.”

On 1 November, Verbeek launched his own website, [Cochrane members for change](#), where he wrote:

We believe that the lack of transparency and trust which we experience at the moment is detrimental to Cochrane and we have to do something about it. There are four major policy issues that we would like to improve:

- 1 Create a culture of open discussion
- 2 Refocus on the heart of Cochrane
- 3 Increase the involvement of Cochrane members
- 4 Find a better business model for Cochrane.

In just three weeks, 620 people including many Cochrane directors and editors of review groups had signed the petition. This is remarkable, also considering that those who signed were identifiable by their names and email addresses, which meant, as Verbeek wrote to me, that “the Central Executive Team is reading and recording this. Within Cochrane you have to be brave to sign a petition like this.”

On the first page in 1984, George Orwell called this: Big Brother is watching you.

Verbeek communicated his petition via email to people he knew and via Twitter. When Gerd Antes tried to send an invitation via the centre directors’ email list, it never came through. When he asked what had happened, he was told that he wasn’t any longer the director of the German Cochrane Centre and that his position at the centre was unclear.

The Cochrane leadership did not welcome Verbeek’s reasonable views and initiatives. Former co-chair Lisa Bero wrote to him that she agreed with Tovey that the petition had been quite destructive. She found it “demoralizing to think that since 1996 I have devoted a large part of my effort to Cochrane and this is denigrated and dismissed. I can see why many within Cochrane have been demoralized by your effort. I think you should take the petition down.”

Tovey wrote that Verbeek had expressed:

“Highly inflammatory and inappropriate comments in relation to the removal of Peter Gøtzsche’s Cochrane membership and also the upcoming election. There are appropriate ways by which you can express your views, in particular by contacting your representatives on Council, or voting in the election, but this is an unprofessional way to use a Cochrane sponsored website that is open to anyone. It is very disappointing to see two people in leadership roles within our community insulting the Cochrane Governing Board and therefore publicly criticising three highly respected co-ordinating editors. I do not wish to see this escalate, so please remove this content immediately.”

Verbeek responded that he was surprised by Tovey’s message and did not fully understand it:

“I have no intention to insult anybody. I asked several persons to read the texts before publishing them to prevent inappropriate content. If you think that I used wording that might be inappropriate in the British cultural context, please let me know. Yes, I am very critical of the process of Peter Gøtzsche’s expulsion ... One of my concerns is that ‘a zero tolerance for bad behaviour’ will be turned into a ‘zero tolerance for dissident opinions.’ Your message certainly increases this fear. This is neither in the interest of the organisation nor in the interest of the British charity that is Cochrane.

As the coordinating editor of the Cochrane Work group I have a duty to inform the community from which my authors and editors come about what is happening in Cochrane. If I do not actively engage with them, soon they will all be gone. As you noticed from my plain language translation of the invitation for candidates for the elections, my constituency would not understand from the official version what these elections are about. Some interpretation was needed here. I very carefully read the Articles of Association and the membership rules and I don’t think that there is anything incorrect or inappropriate in the plain language translation.

To look at this more formally, given that I do not see any inappropriate content, I am not aware that there is any agreement between Cochrane and Cochrane Work or the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health about what we can and what we cannot put on our website. I have checked our Collaboration Agreement, even though it does not have any legal status, and did not find anything there.

As this is not about systematic reviews or the content of systematic reviews but about the elections of Governing Board members, I am not sure in which capacity you are ordering us to take material from our website. The Articles of Association clearly stipulate that the staff employed by the Charity should not be involved in the elections ... As in any disagreement, I am happy to talk to find a solution how we can get forward from this situation. Please let me know when you would be available.”

A conversation was arranged, and Verbeek wrote after this:

“We discussed that you wanted me to withdraw three texts from our Cochrane Work website: two statements about Peter Gøtzsche and one plain language version of the official invitation for candidates for the elections ... the words “mess” and “silly” in the plain language invitation were not well chosen and should be changed. (I did this already) You will have another look at the texts and tell me if there is anything else that could be perceived as inappropriate.

The reason for removal of the Peter Gøtzsche texts that you gave was that these were critical of the Governing Board and that there could be no criticism of the Governing Board on an official website. I argued that the website is not the official Cochrane website but the website of the Cochrane Work community. Very few of my occupational health community understand the situation and they very much appreciated my explanation of the situation. If there would be a need to, you can consult my editorial board.

We also discussed that Cochrane has marked all their websites with a copyright sign and that this would mean that all texts are owned by Cochrane. My point of view is that this sign has been put there without any agreement or even notification. All texts that are on the site are produced by Cochrane Work paid for by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. Since we

don't have any agreement about the contents of the websites, this is owned by my employer FIOH ...

If Cochrane wants to own the content on all their websites, we have to revise our collaboration agreement ... I would be happy to move all content outside the Cochrane network and return to the previous situation where we had our own website.

I still hope that this can be solved in an amicable manner, but you told me that 'they' would not let this situation persist. We did not discuss what this could mean. Therefore, I assume we have a conflict as mentioned in our collaboration agreement and I propose to follow the procedure in the agreement in case of a conflict between the Cochrane Work group and the Editor-in-Chief."

Wilson had now become a plural concept: "They" would not let this situation persist. Verbeek's information about the upcoming elections of four new board members was [plain talk](#):

"With all your hard work for Cochrane, this is the benefit you have earned: you may vote, and you may stand as a candidate in the elections. So, use your rights! It would be foolish to throw away this dearly earned benefit. In this election, Cochrane is especially seeking candidates who are prepared to step into the mess that the current Governing Board has created. As you may recall, four elected board members resigned because they could not support the decision to expel one of their members. So, it is not going to be an easy job ...

This is an exciting opportunity to join the team providing strategic oversight to Cochrane, making sure its decisions are democratic and in the interest of its members. This means that the production of systematic reviews becomes more efficient and leaves less back-breaking slavery for authors ...

Unfortunately, Cochrane cannot give you any money for doing the ungrateful work of a board member because that is legally forbidden for a UK Charity. You are expected to go through hundreds and hundreds of pages riddled with management talk and filter out the important pieces."

There were 18 candidates for the election. Verbeek constructed a member's guide, outlining whether they in their election statements had stated anything that was relevant for his four suggestions for change, and what they had stated. He was not allowed to use the Cochrane email lists to inform people. Lucie Binder from Wilson's office wrote to him on 22 November:

"I am responding to your email as Electoral Officer for this election. Cochrane places high regard on minimizing bias, promoting access, and enabling wide participation. For these reasons, canvassing for specific candidates in board elections is prohibited.

Candidates standing for the board have not been asked to respond to the 'four major policy issues' you have raised. They have been asked to respond on essential issues for effective organisational governance, and to provide evidence of their experience against a prioritised list of skills the board is seeking in order to achieve a balance of experience and abilities for the benefit of the whole organisation. All candidates have provided answers to these questions.

Your correspondence today to Co-ordinating Editors, Managing Editors, and the candidates themselves, seeks - whether directly or indirectly - to give advantage or disadvantage to

candidates based on criteria they have not been asked to respond to. Further, it may encourage voters to disregard relevant information contained in the Candidate Statements.

I request that you stop using Cochrane's official email lists or websites to disseminate your correspondence on this issue. I have also delayed the opening of voting by 24 hours while I take external advice on whether the integrity of this election has been compromised.

After voting opens, the Central Executive Team will send a series of reminders to eligible voters, supported by community news pieces that will provide the opportunity for voters to get to know the candidates better. Voters are asked to choose their preferred candidates on the information made available to them on [elections.cochrane.org](http://elections.cochrane.org) and [community.cochrane.org](http://community.cochrane.org)."

Binder wrote to the candidates that they should not respond to Verbeek's email. This illustrated what a total top-down organisation Cochrane had become under Wilson's leadership and how pervasive the censorship of information was.

It rang hollow when Binder wrote that the Central Executive Team would send community news pieces that would provide the opportunity for voters to get to know the candidates better, when she did not allow Verbeek to do the same. Cochrane headquarters denied the voters the possibility of becoming informed about the candidates' views on essential issues, although many people were highly dissatisfied with the way the current leadership had dealt with them. This is how communist parties operate in one-party states. They stay in control of everything and do not run any risk that their leaders, or those that support them - the Governing Board - might be overthrown.

Verbeek explained on his website, [Cochrane members for change](#), what happened next:

"Lucie, the election officer went missing for the weekend until next Tuesday, when I mailed Mark Wilson to ask where she was. That resulted in a long exchange of emails in which Mark Wilson stated that he did not owe any apologies to anyone. When I asked for the legal advice on the elections, he asserted that this was 'legally privileged' information. This is a non-sense statement because it relates to legal advisers who are not allowed to make public the advice to their clients as a measure to protect their clients. In this case Mark Wilson was the client and he could just let me know what our lawyers had advised him about my actions. In spite of another dozen emails with the Board, I did not succeed in finding out what the legal advice was. So much for transparency in Cochrane.

The invitation for candidates for the elections by the board read as if they were looking for extra members to a board of directors of a commercial firm ...

During the petition Jani tweeted jokingly that Mark Wilson had signed the petition, which was literally correct, but this was another person than the Mark Wilson CEO of the Cochrane secretariat. The crux of the joke was that there is a completely different person, a Canadian bioethicist who is a supporter of change in Cochrane and it was he who signed. This resulted in another angry email from David Tovey and another Cochrane leader in which they both argued what we are doing is very 'damaging' to Cochrane ..."

Why was Verbeek so clear-sighted and daring? Because he would likely retire soon. Wilson could not harm him.

During the Cochrane mid-year meeting in Krakow in April 2019, Verbeek's resistance group [held a meeting](#). Several interesting observations were communicated:

“If you complain about the conduct of how a Cochrane Review is worded, produced or whatever, there is genuine fear of punishment by Cochrane leadership.”

“Given people are fearful to speak up in a way that their name/face is attached to the comment/question there should be a way/mechanism to raise concerns anonymously and/or to escalate concerns if one feels ignored when they have used established channels.”

“People are fearful of putting their hand up and asking questions at large meetings.”

“Where does fear come from? Perhaps from asymmetry in hierarchy in the organization and an unwillingness to admit mistakes.”

“There were problematic events such as censoring of emails sent to mailing lists.”

“In the General Meeting in Krakow when asking what the Governing Board had learned from the crisis and how they acted, the answer felt like it was intended to extinguish any further questions.”

“Current tensions show the bad sides of centralism which is very worrying, e.g. the [Cochrane central executive team holding back emails](#), as indicated by two Cochrane centres (Austria and Sweden).”

The link was to <https://cochranemembers.org/CochraneAT/status/1066305698080964610>, i.e. the homepage for the group, but when I clicked on the link, on 8 December 2021, I could only see this:

“Oops! That page can’t be found. It looks like nothing was found at this location. Maybe try a search?” Had this also been censored by Wilson’s team? I googled *Cochrane central executive team holding back emails* and found this in [a tweet from the Austrian Cochrane Centre](#):

Emails to the Directors list are held back for days by CET or not sent at all. Presumably based on content. This does not allow debate and borders on censorship. Matteo Bruschetti, Director of the Swedish Cochrane Centre, responded: “I’m happy to provide the evidence to prove that @CochraneAT is right.”

Below the minutes from Krakow, Robert Wolff gave a detailed account of his concerns about Cochrane and my expulsion. He referred to the documents I had uploaded in the interest of transparency and also to my book.<sup>71</sup> His final thoughts were:

“Overall, I am deeply saddened by these events. Based on the best available evidence, it seems like the decision to expel Peter Gøtzsche has been at the very least ‘disproportionate’ and it might have been possible to avoid this as well as the subsequent tensions.”

[Further below](#), Jos Verbeek gave a detailed account of the first 100 days after my expulsion:

“It all started at the Colloquium in Edinburgh. Three of the four members of the board who had resigned because of the expulsion of Peter Gøtzsche stood in the large lobby and looked disappointed and forlorn. I felt that this is not how it should be: the most motivated Cochrane members that were on the board were expelled. The Board moved them aside as people who don’t take responsibility and forced them to take away their statement about why they resigned ...

In the days after the Colloquium the situation grew only worse. The Board’s attitude was: ‘We have done everything correctly and we now continue business as usual’ ...

In their opinion no serious damage was done to Cochrane. As evidence, the Board presented the count of news pieces: 250 about Cochrane and only (!) 65 about Peter Gøtzsche. All the

---

<sup>71</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#). Copenhagen: People’s Press; 2019.

major medical journals and all newspapers covered it ... this was big damage to Cochrane, but the Board was in full denial ...

I had talked to many people at the Colloquium who agreed that the way in which the Board had expelled Peter Gøtzsche was outrageous. Moreover, what had happened to him could happen tomorrow to anybody in Cochrane.

Paul Garner and Clive Adams were the ones most supportive of the board and really applauded the expulsion. It took me, stupid me, a while to understand that Clive Adams was bitterly offended by Peter's fierce criticism of the innocent travel fund the Schizophrenia group had maintained in the past with money from the pharmaceutical industry.

Lisa Bero called me to ask how come I supported Peter Gøtzsche because it should be clear to everybody how badly he had behaved over all those years ... I have read everything, and I have heard many stories. None of these stories have given me the idea that Peter has misbehaved in such a way that he couldn't be a member anymore ...

I had put on our Cochrane Work Review group website my account of the affair around the expulsion of Peter Gøtzsche. It was surprising that this was allowed because all other websites were censored by the London CET. (I only recently understood that the CET which used to stand for Central Editorial Team had been changed to Central Executive Team. This is just one of these wonderful examples of how Cochrane is silently transforming from a grass-roots movement to a commercial firm.) I felt a bit uneasy about it, even though there were no rules and it was our own website. I had noticed what had happened to the Nordic Cochrane Centre where the website looked like a forest after a war thanks to the CET."

## **15 Cochrane's CEO Mark Wilson got me fired from my job in Denmark**

Verbeek alluded to that fact that Wilson had changed our website behind our backs. I discovered this via a journalist, two weeks after my expulsion. Wilson had:

- deprived us of our administrative rights without informing us
- deleted me among the employees, even though I was still employed by my hospital
- had removed our tweet column, @CochraneNordic, which mentioned our published criticisms of two Cochrane reviews, including the HPV vaccine review. The tweet column was new and was called @CochraneDK
- removed [my much appreciated article](#) that focused on the essential problems in the current Cochrane leadership, which were harmful for the charity and therefore also for public health
- uploaded an [untruthful and deeply defamatory statement](#) from the Governing Board from 26 September about me on the front page.

Totalitarian actions like this only served to humiliate and demoralise our staff at the centre, and they lead to collateral damage. When I found this out, I wrote to Wilson, on Friday, 28 September, that I withdrew the Nordic Cochrane Centre from the Cochrane Collaboration.

I immediately phoned my boss at Rigshospitalet, Vice Director Per Jørgensen. He had always appreciated my work and his only worry was whether the grant from the Danish Ministry of Health to the centre and the other Cochrane groups in Denmark would be affected. I assured him that

this was not the case, as there was nothing in the Bill of Finances saying that the centre needed to be part of the Cochrane Collaboration.

I wrote to the Ministry the same day, and again on the Monday, 1 October, and explained that if they did not agree with my decision, it would be very easy to change it, as it was very attractive for Cochrane to have our centre in the organisation.

Again, I thought that I would be safe, but the injustice I experienced in Cochrane led to further injustice in Denmark. I was fired, and Wilson played a role in this. Removing me from Cochrane wasn't enough, he had to kick me while I was down and get me fired from the hospital and from my affiliated professorship at the university. He never accepted that I had withdrawn my centre from his empire, which the Ministry was perfectly aware about (see below).

Nonetheless, on 12 October, the Ministry informed Rigshospitalet that it withheld the payment of the annual grant to Rigshospitalet till it had met the conditions for payment.

Incidentally, the same day, I held my centre's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary research symposium. I had asked Tom Jefferson to tell the audience why we should not use Tamiflu for influenza, but he started his talk with something else that made the audience laugh out loud:

Wilson



Voroshylov, Molotov, Stalin and Yezhov



Voroshylov, Molotov and Stalin



Gøtzche and Jefferson



Jefferson



The future?



This is the shortest summary of Cochrane's recent history that I can imagine. It says it all and can be understood without a single word.

Cochrane was no longer a collaboration but was synonymous with one man, its CEO Mark Wilson. Wilson purged his opponents and removed any trace of them, just like Stalin did. Jefferson could very well be next in line to disappear. And the captain on the bridge, Martin Burton, followed orders, sank the Cochrane supertanker, and smiled during his misdeed.

On 29 October, Per Jørgensen and Personnel Manager Mette Risak called me to a meeting where I was summarily and brutally told, with no process at all, that I would be fired, and they didn't give me an adequate justification.

It was my first official call ever, but I was treated as if I had committed a serious crime. I was not even allowed to go back to my office, and my staff were banned from contacting me, which they could not understand the reasoning behind. My five PhD students wrote to the hospital and the Minister, Ellen Trane Nørby, and pointed out that they could not carry on with their work without me as supervisor. But as in Cochrane, the leaders did not care what the consequences were.

During the meeting, Jørgensen and Risak said that they preferred to avoid a dismissal. They wanted me to accept a "mutual agreement on resignation," with a few months' extra salary beyond the three months I would receive in any case, if I accepted this lie.

The subsequent negotiations between my union representative and the hospital resulted in an offer of 10 months' extra pay. This was extraordinary, and my representative was proud of her result, while I took it as an indication that the hospital had a very bad case that would not withstand public spotlight. And of course there was a catch. The hospital wanted to gag me:

"There is agreement between the parties that the content of the agreement is not communicated to third parties. Announcement to employees and relevant internal and external partners will be agreed with the [hospital's] Executive Board. The agreement is the complete and final decision about any claim between the parties without prejudice."

I do not respond kindly to attempts at silencing me and robbing me of my opportunity to tell the truth. I reported back a week later, copying the Ministry, that my freedom of speech was not for sale and that what was going on should come to light.

Jørgensen's official reason for firing me was that he had lost confidence in my ability to lead the centre. This was not an objective reason, and it wildly contradicted the scientific success of the Nordic Cochrane Centre.

On the advice from the former Ombudsman in the Danish Parliament via a mutual friend, MEP Margrete Auken, I engaged a top lawyer. Through the Freedom of Information Act, we got access to various documents and learned that Wilson had never accepted my withdrawal of the centre from Cochrane because, being expelled from Cochrane, I could not make such a decision. We also learned that the Ministry and Rigshospitalet since 1 October via Wilson's emails had been fully aware that the centre continued to be part of Cochrane.

However, the Ministry and the hospital kept this knowledge to themselves, and Jørgensen lied about it at a meeting with my staff on 5 November. When he tried to explain why I would be fired, he continued to give the impression that the centre was not part of Cochrane, even though he knew this was not true and that the conditions for the release of the grant had been met all the time.

Wilson had required that I must no longer work at the centre, and the Ministry and Rigshospitalet had cowered to him, although, according to Cochrane rules, I could continue working as head of department or as chief physician while my deputy handled Cochrane-related tasks.

It was outrageous that Cochrane's CEO aggressively pushed authorities in a sovereign country to dismiss a person from his job in that country, on top of this contrary to Cochrane rules. And it was outrageous that the Ministry and the hospital seemed to have used all means at their disposal to accommodate Wilson's vindictive requirement that I must be fired, even though 50 employees suffered as a result, as they were very afraid of losing their jobs. This uncertainty lasted over two months.

On 11 December, I described the scandal in a Danish newspaper.<sup>72</sup> I translated it into English ([\*My dismissal is scientific judicial murder\*](#)), and informed several speakers on health in parliament that they had been misinformed by the Minister who seemed to have been misinformed by her Head of Cabinet, Per Okkels. They said they would talk to the Minister about it.

I wrote in my article that, instead of silencing an important voice, Rigshospitalet and the Ministry should protect me. Sacking me would send the unfortunate signal that if your research results are inconvenient and cause public turmoil, or threaten the pharmaceutical industry's earnings, which we are very concerned about in Denmark, you might be fired. Strikingly many of the documents my lawyer obtained from the Ministry were articles where healthcare stakeholders – e.g. psychiatrists, doctors with conflicts of interest, the National Board of Health, the Medicines Agency, and editors of journals financed by the pharmaceutical industry – had tried to depict me as untrustworthy to promote their own interests and also hoping that I would one day be

---

<sup>72</sup> Gøtzsche PC. Min firing er et videnskabeligt justitsmord. Politikens kronik 2018; 11 dec.

removed. It was really scary to see the results of this massive lobbying. People who speak truth to power are in danger and endangered.

I explained that my situation was the result of a power struggle between two wings. One, led by Wilson, advocated that everyone in Cochrane should speak with the same voice; opposed open scientific debates about the quality and reliability of concrete Cochrane reviews; emphasised "brand", "our product" and "business" more than getting the science right; and allowed economic conflicts of interest in relation to the pharmaceutical industry. The other wing wanted to bring Cochrane back to its original values: Free scientific debates; no financial conflicts of interest for authors of Cochrane reviews in relation to the companies whose products they evaluated; and openness, transparency, democracy, and cooperation.

I suggested that the centre changed status and name to Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, like several other Cochrane centres planned to do, as it would be of greater value to Denmark than to be a member of a Cochrane organisation that did not live up to its declared values.

There were hearings where I responded to the official letters from my hospital and the Copenhagen Hospital Corporation explaining why they would fire me. It did not matter that my lawyer and I documented that the main arguments were untruthful, and that Wilson had lied to the Ministry. For example, he said that I had not lived up to my obligations according to the Memorandum of Understanding, which was the agreement between him and the Cochrane centre. Several board members pointed out during the show trial that this argument was false. My lawyer noted it was an aggravating factor that neither the Ministry, nor the hospital, had investigated if Wilson's postulates were true but had used them to fire me. It was Wilson who had violated our agreement, e.g. by changing our website behind my back.

My employers continued to lie by claiming that I had endangered my centre's existence, even after I had shown that it was incorrect. They also claimed that my centre could not be a member of Cochrane unless I was fired, which they also knew was untrue, as previous board member Hammerstein had informed the hospital and the Ministry about the rules.

There were several other untruthful statements and contradictions. For example, I was told that my attempt to withdraw my centre from Cochrane was immaterial, as the centre had never been withdrawn, but why did the Ministry then withhold the annual grant and why did Jørgensen lie about it?

After a lot of back and forth, I stopped working on 30 April 2019. My lawyer and I dropped the idea of a lawsuit, as he was not sure we would win. "The hospital had a problem that needed to be fixed," he said. Moreover, it would be very burdensome, expensive, and emotional painful, perhaps for several years. It was better I put it all behind me and entered a new phase of my life.

I had also planned to launch a court case in London against defamation. I convinced a solicitor that my case was so good that he offered me a "no win no fee" deal. He used a lot of time on preparing my case for a barrister who should represent me in court. Then, I was suddenly told that I should pay £5,000 to the barrister for a two-hour introductory meeting with him in London. I am not that stupid. If I had accepted this, what would the next demand have been? £10,000 or more, for the next meeting? So, also in this case, our clear agreement was broken.

I felt I was surrounded by dishonest people everywhere, in Cochrane, in London, and in Copenhagen. What a world this was. It takes many years to build a successful research centre, but only a moment to destroy it by an unwise administrative decision.

## Letters and articles of support to prevent my dismissal

David Hammerstein organised a protest in the form of a petition that contained over 9,000 signatures, which was sent to the Minister with a request to overturn my sacking. There were many prominent names including Cochrane's founder, Sir Iain Chalmers, *BMJ's* Editor-in-Chief, Fiona Godlee, MEP Margrete Auken who has done a lot to ensure that trial data become available to researchers, psychiatrist David Healy, one of the world's leading experts on psychiatric drugs, and John Ioannidis from Stanford University, the world's most cited healthcare researcher.

[Hammerstein wrote:](#)

We are writing to express our concern over the possible dismissal of Peter Gøtzsche from his job at the Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen. We feel that Dr. Peter Gøtzsche's work at the Nordic Cochrane Centre has been an important service to patients, taxpayers and the scientific community in Europe and globally. For many years the prestigious activity and publications of Dr. Gøtzsche have played a pivotal role in favour of the transparency of clinical data, the priority of public health needs and the defense of rigorous medical research carried out independently of conflicts of interest. The recent crisis within the Cochrane Collaboration that involved Dr. Gøtzsche and many other prominent long-time members of Cochrane should be seen in this light.

We ask you to reconsider this possible dismissal due to the great benefits taxpayers, patients and health-care professionals reap from his work aimed at studying the efficacy and safety of medical treatments. We also fear that the dismissal of Dr. Gøtzsche from the Rigshospitalet could harm the international reputation of Danish medical research and could seriously weaken Denmark's traditional support for open scientific debate.

We hope this issue can be resolved amicably and fairly for the sake of public health, robust scientific debate and the wise spending of public money.

Thousands of people gave their reasons why I should not be fired. Here are some examples:

I have been Minister in the Government of British Columbia. One of the scarcest resources available to elected decision-makers is scientific objectivity and truth. Dr. Gøtzsche has inspired thousands and enhanced Denmark's reputation for over 2 decades. Do what you can to discourage a leading hospital and university from penalizing a doctor who tries to protect sick people and other humans from ignorance (Thomas L Perry).

For most doctors Peter C. Gøtzsche is *the* Cochrane Collaboration, and *the* Nordic Centre of Cochrane. There is no other name that represents in the world such a model of scientific honesty. His works have given prestige to Denmark and its science (Juan Gervas).

Peter Gøtzsche is an international treasure. Remove him and you'll look like a bunch of crooks (Janel Hopper).

Sacking Peter Gøtzsche would be a crime against science! (Anne-Marie Krogsbøll).

Dismissing Gøtzsche would do enormous harm to the citizens of Denmark and the world. The future will no doubt view such a decision harshly, just as it will view Gøtzsche's expulsion from Cochrane. The Cochrane leadership is desperate to save face in this embarrassing mess they have created ... reject this intimidation and stand up for science over money and power (Ryan Horath).

I could scarcely believe that there is a possibility that Peter Gøtzsche might be fired. To do so would be to capitulate to pressure from big business and corrupted administrators and/or clinicians. It would make Denmark itself look corrupt and vindictive. He should be promoted, not fired (David Colquhoun).

Dr Gøtzsche is being victimised for upholding the highest scientific standards to expose the shortcomings and dangers of psychiatric drugs. His dismissal is a disgraceful succumbing to vested interests and an abandonment of academic freedom (John Read).

Firing this respected researcher would send a strong message that freedom to report research findings is no longer a protected right, and that facts that do not support/condone certain ideologies present a threat to one's very livelihood and reputation (Rudi Leibik).

What a coincidence that the member they are expelling is a harsh critic of Big Pharma (Sam Stone).

Peter has revealed the truth behind mammography - the Cochrane Foundation should be proud of him for this, I am sure Archie Cochrane would have been (Anthony Miller).

The forces of darkness attack medicine's Galileo (Nick Mailer).

Dr. Gøtzsche is a terrific doctor with the medical oath in mind and heart. Firing him would not only be sad for him and his family but will bring shame to an institution, whose job is to improve health rather than prescribe medications (Angela A Stanton).

How can "making too much noise" be a firing offense? In science, and in the fight for truth, it is sometimes necessary to make noise to be heard (Nina Teicholz).

When I read something from Peter, I instinctively know it is the truth! Do not punish this incredible scientist (Richard Stantiford).

Dr. Gøtzsche's work at the Nordic Cochrane Centre has been exemplary and far reaching in importance. Any punitive action by his home institution on this basis would be a travesty comparable to the unconscionable action of the Cochrane administration (Nortin M Hadler).

The dispute Cochrane has sustained against Dr. Peter Gøtzsche has its roots in the company's concerns over having been criticized. Criticism is vital to research progress, and it should not be attacked this way (Daniela Junqueira).

Some people sent a personal letter to the Minister. [These included](#) Healy, Ioannidis, James Wright, editor of the Cochrane Hypertension Group and Co-managing Director for the Therapeutics Initiative, University of British Columbia, Thorkild IA Sørensen, previous Dean at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Copenhagen, Alvaro Atallah, Director of the Brazilian Cochrane Centre, and the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark.

Ioannidis wrote to the Minister: I am a tenured professor at Stanford University and the current rate of citations of my work in the scientific literature (>3,000 times per month) is the highest among all physicians in the world and among the 10 highest across all scientists in the world. I have unconditional admiration for Peter Gøtzsche. Peter is undoubtedly a giant, one of the greatest scientists of our times and one of the most influential, impactful, and useful voices in medicine at large. I cherish enormously his contributions. I believe he is the most recognizable and prominent scientist that Denmark currently has. His dismissal from the Cochrane board two months ago came as a total shock to me. The possibility of compounding this shock with his dismissal also from the Rigshospitalet would deal a severe blow to medicine, democracy, freedom of thought, and justice. I believe that basic respect for scientific discourse requires that you do not

eliminate your opponents through administrative machinations. Ousting Peter from the Rigshospitalet damages the reputation of Denmark as a free country.

Wright wrote that I was a leader in identifying the settings where the harms of interventions outweigh the benefits, which had benefitted hundreds of thousands of patients worldwide, and that he was devastated to learn that vested interests were now impacting the Cochrane Collaboration. He noted that the patients and the public of Denmark and the rest of the world would be harmed by my dismissal, and that independent, non-conflicted investigators looking at evidence for healthcare interventions were few and far between.

Thorkild IA Sørensen considered it totally unacceptable that Cochrane allows conflicted authors and drew a parallel to the Administration Act's principles of impartiality in the assessment and treatment of a given case, noting that if this is not the case, the credibility of the conclusions vanishes, and they become essentially useless. "It should be possible to find a viable solution that does not involve the dismissal of Peter Gøtzsche, so that the clear and strong voice he has for the patients' benefit can be maintained."

Alvaro Atallah wrote to the Minister that he is number two in Brazil in terms of having published the greatest number of systematic reviews in all scientific fields. Furthermore, that I was paramount in establishing the current standards of evidence-based medicine and that he admired how seriously I take my scientific work and how I had made doctors the world over hold Denmark in high regard.

Olga Runciman from the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark explained that they had made me their Protector because I am a fearlessness, honest and powerful voice in psychiatry based on sound research, a voice that reflects so many of the experiences of voice hearers, which rarely get heard. Dismissing me would send a powerful message to the world that freedom of academic speech is no longer a protected right, and that those who do not condone the ideology of psychiatry risk their very livelihood and reputation.

Ioannidis published a scathing criticism of Cochrane's leadership on 6 December:<sup>73</sup>

Secrecy is perhaps the most damaging part of this sad story ... Despite the statement of the board that what has happened is not about freedom of speech, scientific debate, tolerance, dissent, or criticism, it is precisely these issues that unavoidably surface in this clash ... Under its recent CEO leadership, is Cochrane silencing scientists? Has it been hijacked?

Expelling an elected member of the board who expresses a different viewpoint with some vague excuse that cannot even be disclosed does not befit a scientific organization. It is inappropriate to silence opponents with administrative machinations.

This brouhaha exposes a crisis at the core of the Cochrane leadership and its core values. It is worrisome that neither the remaining board members nor the Cochrane CEO have a particularly strong track record in what Cochrane became famous for: evidence-based medicine and high-quality, independent systematic reviews.

Expulsion of dissenters, intolerance, secrecy, and emphasis on resolution of debates with administrative intrigue and vague, unsupported proclamations rather than by data creates serious damage. Repeated use of strong language and using words written in bold letters cannot replace disclosure of facts and evidence.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ioannidis JPA. [Cochrane crisis: secrecy, intolerance, and evidence-based values](#). Eur J Clin Invest 2018; 5 Dec.

The position that the alleged bad behaviour needs to remain undisclosed has become entirely untenable. Without sufficient documentation and open explanation of their **unusual and suspect** actions (and I put “unusual and suspect” with bold to follow their style), the behavior of the remnants of Cochrane leadership cannot be easily differentiated from a combination of slander, administrative incompetence, and character assassination. If they have solid evidence against PG, they should be transparent about declaring it. At a minimum they should safeguard their integrity, accountability, and leadership by resigning.

Ioannidis’ analysis is very sharp. It could be the drug industry that has hijacked Cochrane. The science has clearly been hijacked by Cochrane apparatchiks without vision and with no competence in clinical trials or meta-analyses. An [apparatchik](#) is “a man not of grand plans, but of a hundred carefully executed details.” This description fits perfectly with Wilson’s personage. Under his rule, Cochrane bureaucrats tried hard to impose their views onto senior scientists at top universities. They also put spin on Cochrane findings without being able to discern whether the reviews were sufficiently reliable to justify it.

They call it Knowledge Translation. In 2017, while I was on the board, I criticised a long report about this that it had taken a year to prepare. The experts in communication that had been involved were unable to communicate to us what they meant. It was words, words, words. I couldn’t find anything concrete that told us what to do.

In Antes’ view, this amateurism, where we were pestered with empty management speak with buzz terms like “Knowledge Translation,” might mean that Cochrane would disappear in absolute irrelevance in a few years’ time.

The Cochrane bureaucracy was outright funny when Ioannidis, in mid-December 2018, after publication of his devastating criticism of Cochrane received an automated e-mail: “Dear John PA, we are very pleased to inform you that your contribution to Cochrane has earned you the right to Cochrane membership!” Cochrane robots do the job.

### **The masterplan went beyond Cochrane**

Janus Bang, who has followed my fight for a better healthcare where more people benefit and fewer are harmed since 2015, was also in Edinburgh (see page 62). He has talked to a lot of people, and his conclusions are:

- Your person and motives were undermined
- Your professional skills and reputation were undermined
- Your scientific studies and books were undermined
- Your institute was undermined
- Your economy was undermined
- Your supporters were undermined.

Bang draws a parallel between the actions of the Cochrane leadership and former US President Donald Trump: You set an agenda that paralyses people by denying the facts; create your own facts; accuse your opponent with bizarre allegations without evidence; and dismiss any evidence that goes against you.

The orchestrated attacks accelerated in 2017 and 2018. A Danish journalist, Kristian Lund, who publishes industry supported journals about healthcare on the web, had gotten access to my financial records three years back in time, and he and his team worked hard on finding something on me. When they didn't, they lied.

They wrote around 20 articles. They sent drafts for the first five for my review, which Lund and his co-editor, Nina Vedel-Petersen, published in the spring of 2017. I counted 63 untruthful statements in the drafts, and, after I had consulted with my hospital, I sent this message, which [was published](#) in one of the articles:

"I have observed that, according to §267 of the Criminal Code, the (articles, ed.) are libellous and express slander. They are affected by so many untruths, speculations, and distortions that it would make no sense to comment specifically on them. They are basically not source-based. On this background, I do not wish to contribute with concrete comments."

The untruthful articles continued unabated, also after my hospital had declared that they had not found any confusion of private money, government grants and other funds, which [was printed](#) in one of the articles.

In February 2018, I complained to the Press Council. I noted that it looked like a carefully planned campaign which ultimate purpose was to close the Nordic Cochrane Centre and get me fired, and that many of the allegations must be characterized as malicious lies, because my hospital, in extensive email correspondence, had informed the journalists in advance that they were wrong. I complained to the Press Council that reprimanded Lund nine months later.

Lund succeeded to convince many people that I had done something wrong, and he and his colleagues often presented their conclusions in the headlines:

- Liselott Blixt: Highly critical that Gøtzsche uses Cochrane money on marketing his own books
- "It is painful and disturbing if Cochrane loses its credibility"
- Gøtzsche uses Cochrane money to promote private business
- PR tours at the state's expense
- Private website for public funds
- Private insurance - paid by the public
- Private profits at the taxpayer's expense - is this allowed, Gøtzsche?
- Expert: Tax problems if Gøtzsche's book promotion is covered
- Danish Cancer Society: Cochrane deliberately manipulates and misleads Danish women
- The stray Cochrane Centre and its unruly boss.

Blixt was very important for me, as she chaired the Committee on Health in parliament. She said in the article that I could get dismissed, if I failed to distinguish between my own money and taxpayers' money. Another politician threatened with reducing our funding. The politicians that had been interviewed represented a majority in parliament.

Because of all the lies, I needed to do a good deal of fire extinguishing. I contacted Blixt, and she realised that she had been fooled by Lund. But of course, the lies – one of which was that I had travelled to Australia on first class - had effect. Lies always have. The trick, guilt by association, was also used. It went like this: "Will it have consequences according to criminal law if Mr. Smith has strangled his wife? We have talked to a legal expert, and he confirmed that it will."

Lund's articles also attacked my research violently, by citing disgruntled people with conflicts of interest, and by claiming mendaciously that I had no documentation for my scientific messages in

the media. Not surprisingly, many people suspected that Lund's smear campaign against me was ordered and paid for by the drug industry, perhaps to a bank account at some exotic place where people don't talk. [Lund wrote](#):

“Peter Gøtzsche is powerful. From his position as an unprecedented autonomous Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre, he has over the years made politicians change their attitude, thwarted ambitious health plans, gotten the patients on the barricades and provoked the pharmaceutical industry ... he is sovereign when it comes to managing the press and public opinion. He speaks in headlines. Masterminds the criticism from which the media creates sensations. Evidence or not. In campaigns with an often-unprepared press, Peter Gøtzsche runs hard on medical colleagues who have the slightest relation with the pharmaceutical industry.”

Lund referred to Wilson's and other Cochrane leaders' denigration of my research on psychiatric drugs back in 2014 but failed to note that they back-pedaled by sending [a correction](#) to the Danish newspaper that was the first to run away with misleading information. I had published ten myths about psychiatry that were harmful for the patients (see page 14). Volunteers translated my article into several languages, including English. Psychiatrist David Healy put it on his [website](#), and it also appeared on Robert Whitaker's [website](#), Mad in America. I showed all the facts a year later in my [book about psychiatry](#), but although my article was thoroughly evidence-based, it caused an uproar in the Danish media, and the Minister, Astrid Kragh, threatened to remove me. My conclusion was misrepresented, somewhat like, “He wants to take away from the patients all the drugs they take,” without any explanation that I would prefer that doctors became better at using them.

In 2014, I was invited to participate in “The Daily Show” in New York, run by John Stewart. I played the role of “Deep throat,” revealing not the Watergate scandal once again but drug industry secrets, in a garage in New York. It was very funny, informative and a great honour to participate. But what Lund got out of this was that my hospital paid for an extra night. I had no other choice because the Show would not pay for this extra, which I needed in order to work all day in my hotel room before I could go home the same evening. It was therefore not an extra night but a day fee the hospital covered, and no problem at all. In the same way, Lund and Vedel-Pedersen wrote that I “spent an extra day in Dubai,” which they knew wasn't true. It was three hours in transit in the middle of the night in the airport before I could take the next plane to Australia.

In February 2018, a conservative Danish newspaper published a large article, [The hair in the medical soup](#), that was an attempt at character assassination. The Director of the National Board of Health, Søren Brostrøm, opined that I searched for a tiny hair in the soup instead of looking at the soup. Brostrøm referred to our ongoing research on the harms of the HPV vaccines. At the meeting I had with him and the Minister in August 2018, I asked if he would still call it a hair in the soup if we found that the vaccines caused serious neurological harms ([which we did](#)). He did not reply.

The first word in the article was “Darkened,” and one of the headlines described me as a cantankerous person with such words that it indicated that I suffered from a psychosis, according to the official definitions. The source was anonymous, but likely a professor of psychiatry.

The article only conveyed views from people who did not agree with my science. It was full of unsubstantiated claims, attitudes and erroneous statements from people representing power bases or interests that we had challenged in our research. In my complaint to the Press Council I wrote that, “If scientific arguments show that we have been wrong in our research or announce-

ments to the public, we are willing to admit it. But there are no concrete examples in Johnsen's article on alleged errors we can relate to." As already noted, my opponents have never been able to show that there was anything wrong with my research.

Also in this case, the journalist was reprimanded by the Press Council to which I had complained. But the damage cannot be undone.

One of the obvious aims of all these groundless personal attacks was to keep me busy defending myself, giving me less time to spend on my research and communication of the evidence to the public. It was a David versus Goliath situation. Those who defended the status quo did not need to back up their opinions with evidence; the journalists let them get away with the most horrendous statements.

## **16 Who was Mark Wilson and was he planted with the aim of destroying Cochrane?**

Mark Wilson destroyed Cochrane, but people were too naïve and gullible to understand this. They protected the Great Leader instead of going against him to save Cochrane and its values.

Wilson sent Cochrane on a Titanic course and refused to see the icebergs people wiser than him could easily see. He saw only himself, in jolly good company with his subordinates on the bridge. He reduced Cochrane to a mediocre organisation where the smartest people left after having been harassed because they were seen as "difficult" or shadowed for the Great Leader.

If I had been a member of the committee that employed Wilson in 2012, I would have done my utmost to open the other members' eyes. His application and CV screamed out loud that this was a person to be avoided.

As already noted, I asked for Wilson's application for the CEO post when I became a board member. His CV boasts about his experience with raising colossal amounts of money and sacking staff, but in Cochrane, he only succeeded with axing and scaring people.

Wilson writes that when he was at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, he "reduced headcount and costs ... When I joined Panos London in 2004 the organisation was on the point of bankruptcy but within four months I had raised over a million pounds to keep it alive ... I designed and implemented a major restructuring which cut staff by nearly 50% but ensured the continued existence of the organisation."

When he was "Operational Manager - Balkans: Geneva June 1996 - March 2000", he "Raised and managed US\$30 million per year to support humanitarian operations ... benefiting hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries."

Wilson's CV is of such a character that an investigative journalist said: "He forgot to say he was on the Moon." All alarm bells should have rung, but no one investigated if these impressive results were true. Considering that Wilson is a journalist, he surely knew how important publicity is. It should therefore have been easy to find mention of some of his Superman achievements in newspapers, but when I tried, I found absolutely nothing.

Another warning signal was that his 9-page CV said nothing about where these hundreds of millions of dollars came from. One always writes in a CV where essential funding has come from, and it is extremely rare that a funder asks for anonymity. The origin of vast amounts of money is usually only hidden if the money comes from organised crime.

Wilson once told me that he had a lot of experience from Russia and had worked there. In his CV, he mentions that he covered Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as a journalist 1987-1988. He was Information Officer in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan 1993-1994 where he designed and ran international media campaigns for operations in the Caucasus and Russia and supported the

development of national information and media departments within the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies in three countries.

He became Master of Philosophy in Soviet and East European Studies 1990 -1991 at the University of Glasgow: "This two-year post-graduate degree was completed in 12 months. Specialist subjects were Soviet foreign and security policy, and economic and monetary policy in the Soviet Union. My thesis was entitled: Gorbachev and the Soviet High Command, 1985-1991."

People who have tried to investigate Wilson's Russian connections did not get very far before they were warned that it could endanger their health if they continued asking questions.

How could such a person become the CEO of Cochrane? The answer, as you will see, could be that there was already institutional corruption before Wilson got employed. Applicants were told that:

"The ideal candidate will have a background that meets as closely as possible the following characteristics:

- Experience of organisational leadership in a multi-stakeholder organisation, preferably but not essentially engaged in scientific or medical research
- Business experience, i.e. understanding of people and fiscal management
- Gravitas/ambassadorial skills to represent The Cochrane Collaboration internationally and to raise its profile
- Demonstrable evidence of well-developed people management and networking skills
- Prior experience of working within or with the not-for-profit sector and/or with health systems of research would be advantageous."

But the criteria for shortlisting applicants for interviews were totally different:

"Due to the extensive interest from applicants from a wide range of sectors (including health services, charities and other not-for-profit organisations engaged in translational research, and the commercial sector), applications were reviewed and then triaged against key selection criteria:

- International experience
- Operational leadership (finance, HR, IT support)
- Experience of or aptitude for fundraising
- Prospect of helping the Collaboration further enhance its international footprint and scope
- Potential to lead a devolved organisation in the field of evidence-based health care
- Complementarity with the Editor in Chief of The Cochrane Library."

The closing date for applications was Friday, 22 June 2012. The announcement for the post said that advice on how to apply could be obtained from Kevin Young, Director for RSA Consulting. I contacted Young on 7 June who told me that there would be a conference call on Monday, 25 June, where a panel of 7-8 people would select people for interviews. On 3 July, Lucie Binder from the CEO office informed people in Cochrane that the members of this selection panel were:

- Jonathan Craig: Co-chair of the Steering Group, Australia
- Nicky Cullum: Co-ordinating Editor, Cochrane Wounds Group, UK
- Marina Davoli: Co-ordinating Editor, Cochrane Drugs and Alcohol Group, Italy
- Kay Dickersin: Director, US Cochrane Center, USA
- Paul Farenden: Interim Executive Director and non-voting chair of the selection panel, UK

- Jeremy Grimshaw: Co-chair of the Steering Group, Canada
- Zulma Ortiz: Author, Cochrane Acute Respiratory Infections Group, Argentina
- David Tovey: Editor-in-Chief of *The Cochrane Library*, UK.

The CEO post was a hugely important one for Cochrane, also considering that its two previous CEOs had not performed well. I therefore found it totally inappropriate that this panel would have only a weekend to read the many applications and agree about which candidates to interview a month later, on 26-27 July in Freiburg.

But the rules were broken. Binder noted, still on 3 July, that only three people, the two co-chairs and the interim CEO, had selected the people to be interviewed. One of the other members of the panel told me a week later that she did not even know who the other applicants were.

I complained to the co-chairs, Farenden and Young about the lack of due process and the violation of the rules, both in relation to the criteria given to applicants and the criteria actually used, and for not involving the selection panel for selecting candidates for interview. I called for the whole procedure to start all over again, as it had so clearly violated the rules for employing people, noting that what had happened would not have been accepted in my country. I made my case clear with a sports allegory: If you tell a football player where the goal is and then move the goal after the player has aimed and kicked the ball, it would clearly be unacceptable.

I asked for a reply within the text of my letter, point by point, but my most important questions were not answered:

Were all the applications sent to all panel members in advance of the shortlisting meeting?

The Collaboration needs to be very cautious that it follows generally accepted procedures and makes transparent and democratic decisions so that it cannot be criticised afterwards and doesn't leave unhappy people behind. Therefore: Will the CV of the CEO (and possibly also the application) be made available once the new CEO has been appointed? I believe it should be. Many researchers put their CVs on a home page, and I am convinced that many in Cochrane will wish to know what the credentials are for our new CEO.

Was any formal process decided beforehand outlining what steps would be taken, e.g. phone contacts with the applicants before the deadline for the application? And if there was, why was it not communicated in writing to the applicants? What I have experienced is so unexpected that it suggests to me that there was a lack of a formal process, or, if there was one, that it was not followed. If a formal process was written down beforehand, I would like to receive a copy of this document.

I did not get a meaningful reply. Craig responded on 4 July: "The wording of the descriptors may vary with setting but the domains do not. The large number of applicants were considered against the pre-approved criteria, and a number have been short-listed and will be considered further at interview. Your concerns about the process have been noted, but we are moving forward to appoint a CEO in a timely manner for the benefit of the Collaboration."

I talked to Grimshaw on the phone, and he told me that I would be very impressed if I knew the names and credentials of the 15-20 people that had been shortlisted for interviews among the 50-60 applicants. If that were the case, then why on earth did they select Wilson for the job?

I consulted with various people who urged me to bring these matters to the Steering Group, which I did on 6 July. But Craig seemed to be in full control also there. On 23 July, I received this meaningless reply:

“The CCSG considered your email but believe that the CEO recruitment process is consistent with the process endorsed by the CCSG in Paris, has been fair and equitable, and so support continuation of the current process. We would request that you respect the process and the decisions that have been made, which we believe are in the best interests of The Collaboration.”

Wilson? In the best interests of the Collaboration?

The same month, one of the panel members told me that the governance was broken, and that there were also serious conflicts of interest, which included a personal relation between Craig and Martin Burton and that both co-chairs had employees on the Steering Group. She also told me that there were two main expectations: to increase the international footprints of reviews and of Cochrane, and to be good at fundraising. Young revealed to me that it was important for the co-chairs to employ someone with a business background.

The result of all this mess, arbitrariness, contradictions, and the breaking of the rules meant that the co-chairs could do what they wanted. This raises the suspicion that Wilson was favoured in some way and might have been planted. Did anyone know about him beforehand? Did anyone tell him he should apply for the job? Was it pre-arranged that he should become the new CEO?

Since the co-chairs did not upload [Wilson’s CV](#) for everyone to see, despite my request, I have done that now. Cochrane should not be a clandestine organisation.

In 2019, I tried to find out what happened when Wilson worked for Panos, which was his last job before he came to Cochrane. That was not easy either. On the frontpage of [Panos London](#), there was no information. But there was a link in the middle, *The archived Panos London website*, which led to [another site](#) where this appeared:

**Notice: This website is online only as an archive & a resource, as Panos London is no longer active. For more information on the active Panos network and what Panos London achieved visit [panos.org.uk](http://panos.org.uk).**

However, [panos.org.uk](http://panos.org.uk) did not lead to “more information” but brought me back to the site where I started. Although Wilson was Executive Director of Panos London and worked there from 2004 to 2012, according to his application to Cochrane, I could not find his name anywhere. I therefore did a Google search on *panos mark wilson* and found this, under [BBC Media Action](#):

Mark Wilson - Panos London  
Name: Mark Wilson  
Organisation: Panos London  
Role: Executive Director  
Country: - Please select -

So, it seemed correct that he had worked there. I also found a [donation website](#) called JustGiving. Below a photo, there was a little story explaining what the fundraising was about. Wilson had run in a race called “2010 Bupa London” and was proud of this performance:

The image shows a screenshot of a JustGiving fundraising page. On the left is a portrait of Mark Wilson, a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light blue shirt. To the right of the portrait is a progress indicator: a purple circle containing '46%' and '£140' below it, with the text 'raised of £300 target by 2 supporters'. Below the progress indicator is a grey 'Give Now' button and a blue 'Share' link. At the bottom of the page, there is a header area with a profile icon, the name 'Mark Wilson', the title 'Mark Wilson's page', and the text 'Fundraising for Panos'. To the right of this header is the Panos logo, which includes the text 'PANOS LONDON ILLUMINATING VOICES' and 'Panos Charity Registration No. 297366'.

“Thanks for taking the time to visit my JustGiving page. The run is over and I made it - and in a time of 54 minutes, not too bad for a first-time 10 km runner! The hard work is done but I am still short of my fundraising target. Thanks for any late contributions which will go to Panos's work in Haiti. My very grateful thanks! Mark.”

Two supporters had donated £140 out of a target of £300 for Panos’ work in Haiti. Somewhat different to the hundreds of millions of dollars Wilson claimed to have raised earlier for humanitarian operations in the Balkans.

Wilson’s application to Cochrane started with his work at Panos:

“I have a proven record of leadership and management success for nearly two decades in complex humanitarian and development organisations at both headquarters and field levels. For the last eight years I have been the Executive Director of Panos London ([www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk)), one of the world's leading communication for development organisations and the largest of a network of seven Institutes with more than 200 staff in over 20 offices in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia, and a combined budget in 2012 of £11.5 million. I led the establishment of the international Panos Network, transferring offices in Africa from managerial accountability directly to me to becoming independent Institutes in their own right. I led the drafting and establishment of a constitution, by-laws and Codes of Conduct relating to programme coordination and fundraising agreed by all members of the Panos Network; its registration as an international NGO; and the development of a Secretariat in New Delhi.

Following this institutional formation, I then led the development and final drafting of the Panos Network's first integrated Strategic Plan 2010-15. This, in turn, demanded a profound strategic reassessment and re-positioning of Panos London. As Executive Director I led this process and completed development of a new Strategic Plan to 2015 for the organisation, along with a business plan encompassing changes in Panos London's structure, systems and processes in order to deliver it. This process demanded respect for the organisation's continuing mission with a determination to adapt and adopt rigorous, effective and efficient internal organisational processes focused on Panos London's areas of demonstrable expertise and added value.”

So, also in Panos, Wilson centralised “managerial accountability” under himself in London and produced a Strategic Plan, which led to a “profound strategic reassessment and re-positioning of Panos London.” This euphemism means that Wilson wanted to have total power and control over everything, just like in Cochrane.

I wondered if Wilson made people working for Panos internationally equally unhappy as those working for Cochrane internationally.

Panos was a large international organisation that stopped existing right after Wilson left and had restructured it. It was strange that, considering all his efforts, the London office closed in 2012. There must have been huge problems when he applied for the CEO post in Cochrane, but Wilson did not mention any of this in his CV. I googled *panos london mark wilson* for the years 2012 and 2013 but did not find anything of interest when I browsed the records.

However, googling *panos london closes*, restricted to records from 2012, led to a revealing [obituary](#) for Panos London from 11 December 2012 by James Deane, Director of Panos from 1994 to 2004 when Wilson took over.

The obituary was long, 2948 words, and mentioned many names for their great contributions, but Wilson’s name did not appear a single time. It is of note that Deane decentralised the organisation and gave the international units the freedom they needed while Wilson seemed to have done the opposite, which he called “becoming independent Institutes in their own right.” This is hard to reconcile, as they were already independent (see more about this just below).

I suspect Wilson destroyed Panos in the same way as he destroyed Cochrane. Deane’s introduction is telling:

“Part of an organisation I helped set up is no longer going to exist. The Panos Institute London has announced that it no longer has the resources to continue. It’s been struggling for some time; project income appears to have dried up; its executive director has left. Panos’ trustees have decided, understandably, that, after almost exactly 26 years, it needs to fold ... Other Panos Institutes in Africa and Asia will continue its good work, at least. Other organisations will serve some of the functions that Panos London had once made its own ... The reason Panos London was founded in 1986 was to help ensure that those most affected by poverty and marginalisation had access to information on the issues that most shaped their lives.”

Deane mentioned that development agendas needed to be defined and driven from within developing countries and that Panos’ purpose was to support a free and plural media capable of providing opportunities for public debate with access to trusted information that doesn’t tell people what to think but provides the facts they need to make up their own minds about an issue and to have their say.

This was the exact opposite of Wilson’s ideas for Cochrane where debate was not allowed, and all should speak with one voice. But a scientific organisation that does not allow self-criticism will degenerate and ultimately disappear.

Deane wrote that “By the early 1990s, with more liberalised media environments sweeping much of the developing world and more democratic environments emerging, we could no longer legitimately determine those issues by sitting in an office in London. We created regional Panos Institutes, accountable to their own boards, drawn from journalists and others from the countries in which we worked ... Panos West Africa had already been established for many years ... Panos Paris, its parent, had done the same in Central Africa... They were joined by Panos Eastern Africa and Panos Southern Africa.”

Deane also explained that decentralisation was more legitimate; made the organisation more resilient to difficulties; and was necessary to sustain funding, “especially given the questions I kept on being asked by our loyal Scandinavian donors of why they should support an organisation based in London.”

To me, this seems to contradict Wilson’s self-praise in his CV. His CV is full of boasting: “great cultural sensitivity ... ready to admit mistakes and learn from them ... The ability to manage cross-cultural organisations and teams is, I believe, one of my greatest strengths ... I am an outstanding writer and speaker, completely at home in front of a camera, giving speeches or facilitating large or small meetings ... I have a personal library of over 4,000 books [or over 5,000 books and journals, which he also noted in his CV] and journals on international political, economic, social and development issues and continue to update my knowledge and expertise in these areas.”

Wilson’s grandiose sense of self-worth is a psychopathic trait (see page 7) and it contrasts starkly with people’s assessment of him. In 2015, an independent assessment of Wilson’s performance during his first three years in Cochrane was carried out by a committee of 12 people who gave their opinions about his leadership. Here are some examples:

- “We are a collaboration ... not a company, and a top down culture is new ... we have many people who in other circles are viewed as world class scientists! Mark ... doesn’t answer when he doesn’t like the suggestion ... can be defensive, talks a lot ... does not always seem to want to work within the culture ... He is not a delegator and one can sometimes feel he does not trust Cochrane contributors.”
- “obviously his standard mode is combative. This can waste time and puts people off. You cannot be strategic if you are always combative. Might be good to develop ability to listen.”
- [You should] “work collaboratively with the outstanding people you are surrounded by.”
- “I have concerns about the management style that is developing.”
- “I do not feel that Mark readily accepts the fact that he reports to the Steering Group ... he does not demonstrate an appropriate level of respect for SG or its members and is not receptive to being challenged either by an individual SG member or by the SG as a whole.”
- “the CEO of CC [Cochrane Collaboration] cannot operate as a CEO of a business company.”
- “the majority of the people that generate Cochrane outputs ... are not employed by Cochrane.”
- “It seems to me that the balance of power between CEO and the Steering Group must be carefully considered.”
- “Important not to play off members of the SG against each other and ‘snow’ the SG. Trust is a critical element in this organisation so trust has to be earned and built.”

It is contradictory that Wilson, with his self-declared capabilities in person management, lost so much of his own personnel during his first six years in office. After there had been a particularly high turnover, Wilson described his poor leadership in positive terms in an email he sent to everyone in Cochrane on 9 February 2018. When I saw this, my reaction was that he must be in great trouble. The headline was: [New structural changes to Cochrane’s Central Executive Team \(CET\)](#).

On 1 October 2015, the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) in the UK announced an upcoming evaluation of the health and economic impact of Cochrane reviews from 2005 to 2014. The NIHR spent approximately £6m a year supporting the UK Cochrane Centre and the 21 Cochrane review groups based in the UK out of 52 worldwide. [The report](#), with its [appendices](#), which came out in February 2017, is publicly available, as is [Cochrane’s response](#).

I know three of the six assessors, and according to one of them, the NIHR wanted to cut all the funding, but the evaluation team persuaded them to continue. The NIHR was dissatisfied that it took so long for a review to be published, and they were also unhappy with Wilson's leadership. According to another assessor:

- Wilson single-handedly pulls in people in leadership positions that others with more knowledge about them and the local situation have found unqualified
- Wilson had contacted UK funders, but they don't trust him
- Wilson had increased funding where more knowledgeable people had decreased it earlier because of poor performance
- The assessment report was quite critical of the huge staff at the CEO office.

On 23 April 2021, Professor Ken Stein, Director of the Evidence Synthesis Programme at the NIHR spoke at a [webinar](#) about the work in the UK Cochrane groups and their future funding. He criticised Cochrane quite substantially for much the same reasons as I had done and said the writing had been on the wall for eight years, which was exactly the period when Mark Wilson ruled the organisation.

About the failing scientific integrity, Stein noted that, "This is a point raised by people in the Collaboration to ensure that garbage does not go into the reviews; otherwise, your reviews will be garbage."

It is highly unusual for a top funder to say that the recipient of the funding must ensure that garbage does not go into the research; otherwise, it will be garbage. This suggests that Stein was aware of Jefferson's statement, "garbage in and garbage out ... with a nice little Cochrane logo on it," from [Demasi's article](#) that came out during the Cochrane colloquium in Edinburgh or from my book about [Cochrane's moral collapse](#). Jos Kleijnen, previously the Dutch Cochrane Director, told me that Stein was present in Edinburgh and knew very well that I had been expelled.

Wilson suddenly left his job, in the middle of April 2021, seven days before the webinar where the UK funder announced that a major budget cut was likely in 2022. There was no farewell message from Wilson who was otherwise known to put himself in focus and take credit for what others had achieved through arduous work. I assume Wilson left Cochrane because he knew what was coming a week later. I have not been able to find any trace of him on Google.

This seems to be the beginning of the end for Cochrane. The damage Wilson and Burton have caused is irreparable, which is what I have heard in evidence-based circles.

Four months after the webinar, it became much worse for Cochrane. In late August 2019, the NIHR informed Cochrane review groups based in England that it would cease their funding at the end of March 2023. Cochrane was now in big disarray, and the questions and answers on the Cochrane website tell a [story of considerable confusion](#).

In November 2021, I could no longer find the message on the Cochrane website I saw on 3 September about the loss of funding. A worldwide charity like Cochrane should not delete important messages on their website, but this message was gone. I therefore did a Google search and incidentally [found this out](#):

The Danish Government is only second to the NIHR in the amount of funding it donates to Cochrane (which is about £2 million a year). This is due to my work and persistence. I lobbied politicians and civil servants in the Ministry for years before they agreed to permanently fund all Cochrane activities in Denmark.

Denmark will therefore become the biggest funder of Cochrane in 2023. My reward for this was that I was kicked out of the organisation. Perhaps it is time for the Danish Government to follow the British example and stop all core funding of Cochrane. It is no longer worth it.

Unfortunately, the moral and scientific decline of what was once an idealistic and exemplary grassroots organisation continues. Cochrane's motto, "Trusted evidence," which sounds like self-praise in an advertisement from a drug company, was invented by Mark Wilson, but virtually every Cochrane review of psychiatric drugs should be distrusted because the authors and editors do not pay sufficient attention to all the flaws in the trials.<sup>74 75</sup>

As a recent example, the Cochrane network meta-analysis of depression pills in children, published in May 2021 with the editor of the Cochrane Common Mental Disorders Group, Sarah Hetrick, as first author, is garbage in, garbage out. [I have explained](#) that it is so misleading that it is outright dangerous for children.

It is similarly misleading as the 2018 notorious network meta-analysis of depression pills in adults, by Cipriani et al. in *Lancet*, which I described on the Mad in America website as: [Rewarding the companies that cheated the most in antidepressant trials](#). One of the authors of this flawed meta-analysis is Julian PT Higgins, a statistician who is also one of the two editors of the [Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#), which describes over 636 pages how Cochrane reviews should be done. A re-analysis by my colleagues from the Nordic Cochrane Centre showed that the outcome data reported in *Lancet* differed from the clinical study reports in 12 of the 19 trials they examined.<sup>76</sup> It can hardly be worse. But, as a commentator recently wrote, nothing will change unless the recommendations of previous critiques are actually implemented. He added that to continue "flogging the Cochrane Review dead horse" won't make it run.

Wilson once told me he loved fights because he always won them. He was also confident he would win his fight with me. But did he? He abused Cochrane for his own purposes, and it is regrettable that he took the whole Cochrane empire with him in his fall. I feel sad about what he did to this once magnificent organisation. The game is over.

## 17 Who was the person Cochrane expelled?

My personal story is not important. I just happened to be the person who objected the most to Wilson's brutal reign in Cochrane and therefore became expelled. As you have seen, this story is much bigger than me, but it would be odd if I did not say a little about who I am. You cannot be objective if you talk about yourself, but I can at least try to convey the most important facts.

As a child, I questioned everything.<sup>77</sup> As an adult, I told other people that they should also ask questions and wrote a book advising them about how they could find reliable answers to the questions they had about healthcare.<sup>78</sup>

My mother told me that I should take two vitamin pills every day, a green and a red one, but I asked why. That was because they were good for me. I asked how she knew. That was because grandpa said so. This ended the argument. My grandfather was bright and had a lot of authority.

---

<sup>74</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly psychiatry and organised denial](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mental health survival kit and withdrawal from psychiatric drugs](#). Ann Arbor: L H Press; 2022.

<sup>76</sup> Munkholm K, Paludan-Müller AS, Boesen K. [Considering the methodological limitations in the evidence base of antidepressants for depression: a reanalysis of a network meta-analysis](#). *BMJ Open* 2019;9:e024886.

<sup>77</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly medicines and organised crime: How big pharma has corrupted health care](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Survival in an overmedicated world: look up the evidence yourself](#). Copenhagen: People's Press; 2019.

He was also a general practitioner. I had great respect for him, but how could he be so sure the pills were good for me? In addition, they tasted and smelled badly; opening the bottles felt like entering a pharmacy. I dropped the pills, and my mother didn't try to force me into eating them.

It all looked so simple back then. As vitamins are essential for our survival, it must be good to eat vitamin pills to ensure we get enough of what we need to thrive. But biology is rarely simple, and it took another 50 years before it became known whether vitamins are beneficial or harmful. A 2008 review of the placebo-controlled trials of antioxidants (beta-carotene, vitamin A and vitamin E) showed that they increase overall mortality.<sup>79</sup>

I became a biologist but didn't know what to do. My grandfather suggested I go into the drug industry. I became a drug salesman in the Astra Group in 1975, product manager eight months later, and set up a medical department in 1977 in Astra-Syntex, where I handled registration applications and did clinical trials. I worked mainly with naproxen, a painkiller for arthritis, and saw many examples of the company having tortured their trial data till they confessed and could be used in a marketing that harmed the patients.

I therefore decided to leave and chose the most cumbersome way out. My director allowed me to take courses in medical school for 10% of my working time to improve my skills. I did not tell him that my plan was to become a doctor, but he was happy with my work, so a few years later, I was away for a third of the time, which became half of the time. During the last two years I worked for Astra-Syntex, I was an external consultant.

In 1984 I became a doctor and worked at hospitals in Copenhagen, mainly at Rigshospitalet, the national hospital. In May 1990, I defended my doctoral thesis, *Bias in double-blind trials*,<sup>80</sup> which was likely the first in the world based on meta-analyses that summarised a whole therapeutic area.

I showed that the clinical trials were highly unreliable and depicted the new, expensive arthritis drugs in an overly positive light, not only because of widespread data torture and occasional fraud but also because the design of the trials was often biased, e.g. by overdosing the comparator drug so that is caused many harms. I published my six articles as sole author, a major one in the *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* and another in *The Lancet*.

My dissertation became widely known. Shortly after it came out, one of the world's finest biostatisticians, Douglas Altman from Oxford, found it in a literature search and sent it to Iain Chalmers who wrote to me praising it. I had no idea who he was, but that didn't last long. He invited me to the British Minister of Health's opening of The Cochrane Centre in Oxford in November 1992 and paid for my travel. Both Iain and Doug became friends and very important for my career. I have published 46 papers with Doug, more than with anybody else.

In February 1993, having learned that a Canadian Cochrane Centre would be established, I suggested to Iain that I set up a Nordic Cochrane Centre. A month later, I had received support from Christian Nissen, the director at Rigshospitalet, who greeted us at our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary research meeting in 2018 saying: "When Peter Gøtzsche crossed no man's land between the 14 floors and the now demolished red administration building in which I had an office, I had never heard of the Cochrane Collaboration. Whether it was Peter's description of the subject matter itself or his enthusiasm, I do not know. But he convinced me of the perspectives."

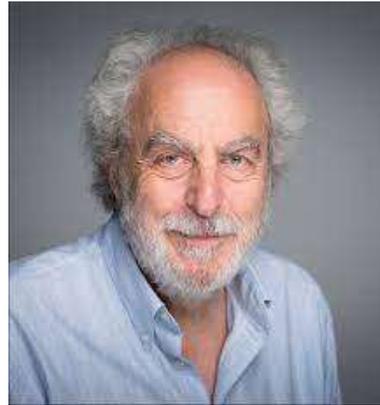
---

<sup>79</sup> Bjelakovic G, Nikolova D, Gluud LL, et al. Antioxidant supplements for prevention of mortality in healthy participants and patients with various diseases. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2008;2:CD007176.

<sup>80</sup> Gøtzsche PC. Bias in double-blind trials. *Dan Med Bull* 1990;37:329-36.



Sir Iain Chalmers



Douglas Altman

The Nordic Cochrane Centre was one of the four centres to have been established before the first Cochrane Colloquium, which took place in 1993 in Oxford. We were about 80 people from around the world, and Iain recalled 25 years later that I introduced myself by saying that it was my hobby as well as my job to hunt down biases. We started the Cochrane Collaboration, and the same month I opened the Nordic Cochrane Centre at Rigshospitalet.

The Cochrane Collaboration is a charity, and virtually none of us had any money to spend on Cochrane activities. Even today, by far most of the work is carried out by unpaid volunteers. The Nordic Cochrane Centre survived on project grants for something other than Cochrane work for many years, until I obtained permanent government funding in 2001 for the centre and the three international review groups I had helped establish with a base in Copenhagen.

Today, there are over 10,000 Cochrane reviews or protocols to upcoming reviews in the *Cochrane Library*.

I worked half-time, four years later full-time, became a specialist in internal medicine, a chief physician, and a professor in clinical research design and analysis.

In 1996, I took over the work from the UK Cochrane Centre of developing the software used to make Cochrane reviews and other software of central importance to the organisation.

We did top level research. People have told me that I am the most known Danish doctor in the world, and that I am the only Dane to have published over 70 papers in "the big five" (*BMJ*, *Lancet*, *JAMA*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and *New England Journal of Medicine*). My scientific works have been cited over 150,000 times and when the *BMJ* established an editorial board in 1995, I was asked to become a member. I have also handled cases of suspected scientific misconduct.

When I tell people the truth, they might say that I am rude, too direct, or that there is something wrong with my "tone." But that's my style. As a biologist, I have learned that when you see a bug, you call it a bug. And when I see bugs in poor research, I explain what they look like, which is not personal but my obligation as a scientist. Cochrane is highly dominated by British people and the rest of us can have difficulties living up to British norms. The Brits might say, "That sounds interesting" when they really mean "This is crap," and they might say, "With all due respect," followed by a tremendous insult.

I ploughed through heavy textbooks in statistics when I worked on my dissertation and learned so much that I once did a three-way analysis of variance on a pocket calculator, as I had not yet acquired my first computer. This contributed to improving my skills as a research generalist, and it is one of the reasons why I have done research in so many different areas. My opponents have

argued that it is impossible to be active in so many fields and be right every time, but they have not found faults with my research.

I appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* three times in just two years, about three different issues: The placebo effect is questionable (*New England Journal of Medicine* 2001);<sup>81</sup> Pfizer, then the world's largest pharmaceutical company, had cheated with their antifungal trials (*JAMA* 1999);<sup>82</sup> and mammography screening does more harm than good (*Lancet* 2000 and 2001).<sup>83 84</sup> One of the *New York Times'* reporters, Donald G McNeil, visited me and wrote an article in the series, *Scientists at work* called *A career that bristles with against-the-grain conclusions*.<sup>85</sup> It started thus:

Seated at an eerily neat desk in a modern office on the grounds of Denmark's state hospital, Dr Peter C. Gøtzsche does not seem a man whose bite is much worse than his very gentle bark. But this tall, gray-haired statistician is sending some eminent doctors into fits of apoplexy as he quietly implies that they've wasted their lives defending old wives' tales, maltreated their patients or assisted in frauds that perhaps ought to land them in jail.

I have given over 500 lectures and have received many scientific awards. In 2012, I was Winner of the annual Prescrire Prize for my book about mammography screening.<sup>86</sup> I wrote an information leaflet for women contemplating whether or not they should go to mammography screening, which volunteers have translated into [16 languages](#). The US Center for Medical Consumers called it "the first honest mammography information for women written by health professionals." In 2014, I was Winner of the British Medical Association's Annual Book Award in the category Basis of Medicine for my book about organised crime in the drug industry.<sup>87</sup>

When I received the 2016 HealthWatch Award at the Medical Society of London, the title of my talk was: *Why is it controversial to tell the truth about health care?* [I told the audience](#) that, "My work is something like that of a medical detective. People come to me if they feel something is wrong in healthcare. When I start looking into these issues, I usually dig very deep. I find skeletons, and when I expose these skeletons, the people who buried them can get very angry."

I am often called controversial, which people may say when they don't like my research results but have no counterarguments. It is also considered controversial to unearth skeletons. Journalists sometimes ask me why I look for controversies, but I don't; they find me.

I might have contributed more to Cochrane than anyone else. For many years, the Nordic Cochrane Centre was the biggest Cochrane centre in the world, with around 18 employees. I helped establish four of Cochrane's 52 review groups and reconstructed entirely two of the three groups based in Denmark in 2017-2018, which required a detailed knowledge of local conditions and politics. I have also helped establish associate Cochrane centres in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, and Russia.

---

<sup>81</sup> Hróbjartsson A, Gøtzsche PC. Is the placebo powerless? An analysis of clinical trials comparing placebo with no treatment. *N Engl J Med* 2001;344:1594-602.

<sup>82</sup> Johansen HK, Gøtzsche PC. Problems in the design and reporting of trials of antifungal agents encountered during meta-analysis. *JAMA* 1999;282:1752-9.

<sup>83</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Olsen O. Is screening for breast cancer with mammography justifiable? *Lancet* 2000;355:129-34.

<sup>84</sup> Olsen O, Gøtzsche PC. Cochrane review on screening for breast cancer with mammography. *Lancet* 2001;358:1340-2.

<sup>85</sup> McNeil DG Jr. [Confronting cancer: scientist at work – Peter Gøtzsche; a career that bristles with against-the-grain conclusions](#). *New York Times* 2002 Apr 9.

<sup>86</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Mammography screening: truth, lies and controversy](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Deadly medicines and organised crime: How big pharma has corrupted health care](#). London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2013.

I was a member of the Cochrane Steering Group from 1993 to 1996; established two Cochrane methods groups based in Denmark; and was an editor of the Cochrane Methodology review group for 17 years. I co-authored guidelines for good reporting of research that leading medical journals use: CONSORT for randomised trials ([www.consort-statement.org](http://www.consort-statement.org)), STROBE for observational studies ([www.strobe-statement.org](http://www.strobe-statement.org)), PRISMA for systematic reviews and meta-analyses ([www.prisma-statement.org](http://www.prisma-statement.org)), and SPIRIT for trial protocols ([www.spirit-statement.org](http://www.spirit-statement.org)). I held two well-attended workshops for Cochrane editors in Copenhagen in 2001 and 2002 and contributed a lot to knowledge translation - a key issue in the current Cochrane strategy – as I was often in the media.

The main problem for Cochrane is selective and biased reporting of research results. As the first person in the world, I obtained access to clinical study reports at the European Medicines Agency in 2010 after a three-year process that involved a complaint to the European Ombudsman.<sup>88</sup> A couple of years later, Margrete Auken, a few other politicians, David Hammerstein and me succeeded to influence European law so that we now have access to far more clinical trial data than earlier. We changed a political majority for continued secrecy into a crushing victory for openness: On 2 April 2014, the EU Parliament agreed to the new Trials Directive with 594 votes for, 17 against, and 13 abstentions. These two achievements are more important than anything else I have accomplished, but Cochrane's CEO Mark Wilson never touched these subjects.

In 2016, members of the EU Parliament tried to get me elected for a vacant post at the Management Board of the European Medicines Agency, but a political majority preferred an MEP. I have lectured in the EU, UK, Dutch and Danish parliaments and at two EU Commission meetings.

Some of the Cochrane reviews I have initiated are among the most important ones. We have shown that mammography screening does not reduce total mortality or total cancer mortality and leads to substantial overdiagnosis and overtreatment, which includes an increase in mastectomies; that health checks do not work and are likely harmful (*BMJ* 2012,<sup>89</sup> which landed us on the [frontpage of The Times](#)); and that the effects of placebo are small, if any.

In Denmark, politicians and patients appreciated my work. Everyone attached great importance to the independence of the centre, and I saved Danish taxpayers an annual amount corresponding to about 100 times the annual budget for our centre by just three reviews (mammography screening, regular health checks, and alpha1-antitrypsin).<sup>90</sup>

## Life after Cochrane

Wilson's tyranny and brutality cost me my job. But it also opened my eyes. Hammerstein told me in Edinburgh that I would get a better life after my excommunication from the Cochrane church, and he was right. Life after Cochrane was much more meaningful than if I had continued to work for an organisation Wilson had systematically destroyed and developed into a bureaucratic monster, and whose most valuable members he continued to terrorise and lose.

I am the owner of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's collected works, inherited after my grandfather who inherited them after his father, and I have always shared Kierkegaard's view that

---

<sup>88</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Jørgensen AW. Opening up data at the European Medicines Agency. *BMJ* 2011;342:d2686.

<sup>89</sup> Krogsbøll LT, Jørgensen KJ, Grønhøj Larsen C, Gøtzsche PC. General health checks in adults for reducing morbidity and mortality from disease: Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ* 2012;345:e7191.

<sup>90</sup> Gøtzsche PC, Johansen HK. Intravenous alpha-1 antitrypsin augmentation therapy for treating patients with alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency and lung disease. *Cochrane Database Sys Rev* 2016;9:CD007851.

you must choose yourself and be truthful to yourself. Otherwise, you will lose yourself. You should never abandon your ideals for a monetary gain or other gains.

Journalists have often asked me if my work has not made me many enemies. You bet, but then you should see my friends. They are the best you can imagine. People who hold on to their moral principles and are willing to suffer for them, or even die for them, are some of the most amazing people you can meet. They are the ones who sign up for the resistance movement when a country is occupied by a foreign power, but there are not many of them.

In December 2013, three months after my [book about organised crime](#) in the drug industry had come out, I was in Boston for a meeting and a radio host in New York interviewed me live for half an hour. By the end of the interview she suddenly asked me if I was not afraid of ending up at the bottom of the Hudson River with my feet in concrete. I replied that the risk I ran was minimal, compared to the risk my grandfather ran during the war, where he was taken by the Gestapo and the worst torturer executioner Denmark ever had, Ib Birkedal Hansen,<sup>91</sup> who was shot in 1949 as a traitor. My stepfather was also taken by the Gestapo. They shot everyone in his group but him.

On 27 June 2018, I gave a lecture at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin for young researchers from all over the world. The organisers had started a new series of lectures, *Heroes of Science*, and I was one of the two speakers. My lecture was [Survival of a whistleblower](#).

I explained how you can go against the flow and be true to what your research results have shown, and not be afraid to criticise the results of influential people when their research is not okay, and still survive. I also said we should not fear tyrants, because if we did not say no, it would only get worse. I told the audience that we must never forget the Nazi atrocities.

The Nazi who interrogated my grandfather threatened him with torture and also said that they could rape his wife and my mother. This didn't happen. He spoke very good German and got on good terms with the Nazi. He played Beethoven's sonatas so well that he was offered a career as a concert pianist, which moved the Nazi. He should have been deported to a concentration camp outside Leipzig, but because the Allied Forces had destroyed the train tracks in northern Germany, he ended up in the Frøslev camp on the border instead. When the Allies stood outside Leipzig, the Germans poured petrol over the barracks where they had chased all the prisoners together and set it on fire. There were almost no survivors. Those who ran out of the barracks were shot or committed suicide by running into the electric fence. The idea behind this last minute mass murder likely was not to leave any witnesses who could testify against their torturers after the war.

The co-founder of CrossFit, Greg Glassman, had read all my books and was appalled about what Cochrane had done to me. One day, in the spring of 2019, I had Glassman and several of his directors on the phone. They invited me to give a talk at their headquarters in Santa Cruz in California and also at a meeting in Madison entitled: [Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#).

It is a relief that I shall never again be harassed by small bureaucrats and bookkeepers with psychopathic traits who don't know what science, pioneering work, genuine leadership or freedom is about.

In contrast to such people, the patients appreciate my work. In 2016, I became Protector of the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark, which has psychologist and psychiatric survivor Olga Runciman as its chairwoman. In 2019, Professor Allyson Pollock ensured that Tom Jefferson and I became Visiting Professors at the University of Newcastle. In 2020, I got an award from Anette

---

<sup>91</sup> Knudsen PØ. Birkedal. En torturbøddel og hans kvinder. København: Gyldendal; 2004.

Ulstrup, chairwoman for the Patient Association Denmark, for being the decade's most brave doctor in Denmark. She also congratulated me for my book on vaccines<sup>92</sup> that came out the same week in its Danish translation.



Olga Runciman



Allyson Pollock



Anette Ulstrup

On 9 March 2019, I held an international symposium about scientific freedom in Copenhagen and opened the [Institute for Scientific Freedom](#). I also called for [crowd funding](#). The symposium drew attendants from as far away as California, India and Australia, even though we only announced it on websites and social media. The lectures were filmed and are [freely available](#).

I currently work as researcher, lecturer, author, and independent consultant. I have been an expert witness in lawsuits in Alaska, California, New York, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Holland and Australia. It is great fun to disentangle the spider's web of issues in lawsuits, which is quite similar to being a research detective, and hoping you may contribute to killing the spider.

### Videos of lectures and interviews

One of the reasons why CEO Mark Wilson made a huge mistake when he expelled me is that, for many people, I exemplified what Cochrane was. In 2008, a former co-chair of the Cochrane Steering Group, Adrian Grant, wrote to the then CEO, Nick Royle: "I advise you to think hard about how you should reply to this. You did finish your email to Peter with an unfortunate sentence and I can understand why Peter considers this discourteous. In many ways, Peter is the 'conscience' of the Collaboration. We may find him irritating at times, but we should never ever be dismissive of him."

As already noted, in one of his excellent analyses of the Cochrane scandal, Ryan Horath wrote: "The CEO brought a dictatorial mindset to Cochrane, and he believes Gøtzsche is bad for the 'brand.' Not being a scientist, he has no recognition that the work Gøtzsche does IS the brand."

Even today (December 2021), a search on YouTube on "Cochrane Collaboration" shows that 3 of the top 10 most viewed videos, including the top one, with 434,000 views, are to my interviews and lectures:

[Dr Peter Gøtzsche exposes big pharma as organised crime](#)

[Peter C. Gøtzsche: Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse](#)

[Dr Peter Gøtzsche talks about his background and explains the Cochrane Collaboration](#)

---

<sup>92</sup> Gøtzsche PC. [Vaccines: truth, lies, and controversy](#). New York: Skyhorse; 2021.

Here is a list of the most viewed of my lectures and interviews in English or with English subtitles on YouTube (as per March 2021, in thousands):

Title (abbreviated)	Length	Views	Link
Big pharma is organised crime	7:42	416	<a href="https://bit.ly/2XcHMAz">https://bit.ly/2XcHMAz</a>
Deadly Medicines and Organised Crime	54:05	66	<a href="https://bit.ly/2JADhrF">https://bit.ly/2JADhrF</a>
Crimes in the drug industry and the lies in psychiatry	15:44	55	<a href="https://bit.ly/39JSD7L">https://bit.ly/39JSD7L</a>
Overdiagnosed & overmedicated	1:32:46	43	<a href="https://bit.ly/2yrxfHk">https://bit.ly/2yrxfHk</a>
Psychiatry has gone astray	6:19	36	<a href="https://bit.ly/2V16HV5">https://bit.ly/2V16HV5</a>
Screening for breast and prostate cancer	7:52	26	<a href="https://bit.ly/2wizL28">https://bit.ly/2wizL28</a>
Psychiatric drugs, few benefit, many are harmed	58:23	26	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dSgSUw">https://bit.ly/3dSgSUw</a>
Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral collapse	1:06:56	24	<a href="https://bit.ly/3aUfZsw">https://bit.ly/3aUfZsw</a>
Psychiatric drugs, few benefit, many are harmed	49:17	23	<a href="https://bit.ly/2Xb3iWm">https://bit.ly/2Xb3iWm</a>
Discussion, Gøtzsche & Whitaker, psychiatric epidemic	45:46	23	<a href="https://bit.ly/347xumS">https://bit.ly/347xumS</a>
Forced psychiatric treatment must be abolished	1:50:06	20	<a href="https://bit.ly/2JFXv32">https://bit.ly/2JFXv32</a>
Psychiatric drugs do more harm than good	2:10:41	14	<a href="https://bit.ly/39FrdQw">https://bit.ly/39FrdQw</a>
Prescription drugs are the third leading cause of death	18:06	14	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dWp3z1">https://bit.ly/3dWp3z1</a>
Survival of a whistleblower	49:42	11	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dWXZQc">https://bit.ly/3dWXZQc</a>
On the wrong track, psychiatric epidemic	53:22	10	<a href="https://bit.ly/2wSLNQ8">https://bit.ly/2wSLNQ8</a>

Websites: [scientificfreedom.dk](http://scientificfreedom.dk) and [deadlymedicines.dk](http://deadlymedicines.dk).

Twitter: @PGtzsche1

