



NEWS

Expelled Cochrane director to set up new institute for “integrity in science”

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London

Peter Gøtzsche, who was expelled from the Cochrane collaboration last year,¹ plans to found a new Institute for Scientific Freedom. The new organisation, whose goal is “to preserve honesty and integrity in science,” will be launched on 9 March at an international symposium in Copenhagen.

Gøtzsche, who was a member of Cochrane’s board until his sacking last autumn, told *The BMJ* that the institute will be financed by crowdfunding. It will focus on lobbying for improvements in healthcare research quality as well as producing its own research.

“Lobbying will be a big part of what we do,” he explained. Gøtzsche has previously lobbied the European parliament for improved access to clinical trial data and hopes to continue to do so through the institute.

“We have no ambition to rival Cochrane,” he said, adding that the idea for the new body came from Peter Breggin, a US psychiatrist and critic of psychiatric drug and shock treatments. The British epidemiologist Tom Jefferson, whose efforts to uncover unpublished trial data led to questions over the benefits of flu vaccines, will also be involved, Gøtzsche said.

“When Peter Breggin called me with the proposal I was initially sceptical,” he said. “I wondered how many people would be interested in an organisation like this. But there is a lot of enthusiasm. People can see that healthcare research is not in a good state.”

Gøtzsche’s high profile sacking after he was accused of bringing Cochrane into disrepute split the collaboration’s members and led some to question whether it had moved too far from its founding principles.² Gøtzsche was one of Cochrane’s founding members and head of the Nordic Centre in Denmark. In recent years he repeatedly clashed with Cochrane’s leaders, who

accused him of breaching its spokesperson policy. Gøtzsche made contentious statements about the drug industry, including a claim that psychiatric drugs do more harm than good, and criticised the quality of Cochrane’s own reviews. He also attacked Cochrane’s policy on conflicts of interest.

The new institute will have three founding principles, Gøtzsche told *The BMJ*: that all science should strive to be free from financial conflicts of interest; all science should be published as soon as possible and made freely accessible; and all scientific data, including study protocols, should be freely accessible.

Gøtzsche’s employer, the Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen, which hosts the Nordic Cochrane centre, has told him it intends to fire him. The professor’s lawyers are currently arguing against the decision, which has not yet been finalised. Decisions on exactly how the new institute will be structured have been put off until Gøtzsche’s status is clarified.

“We have not decided yet how to organise ourselves, as this will depend on whether I get sacked or not, but we have great expectations,” he said.

Gøtzsche is currently crowdfunding for his legal costs. A GoFundMe page set up on 19 December 2018 says that any surplus will be used to pay for the institute. So far his appeal has raised Kr115 914 (£14 020; €15 530; \$17 900). The target is Kr10m.

- 1 Hawkes N. Cochrane director’s expulsion results in four board members resigning. *BMJ* 2018;362:k3945. doi:10.1136/bmj.k3945 30224559
- 2 Newman M. Has Cochrane lost its way? *BMJ* 2019;364:k5302. doi:10.1136/bmj.k5302 30606713

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