

**Rejection letter of the Cochrane review
“vitamin C for the common cold” update of 2016**

From: Chris Del Mar <cdelmar@bond.edu.au>
Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2017 09:20
To: Hemilä, Harri O; Liz Chalker
Cc: Ann Jones; Mark Jones; Justin Clark; Liz Dooley; David Tovey (dtovey@cochrane.org)
Subject: A066 - Vitamin C for preventing and treating the common cold

Dear Harri and Liz

I am writing to inform you that we are very reluctantly relieving you both from authorship of this review, which has stalled in the update phase. We are very sorry it has come to this, but this is too important a review to allow to stagnate, and I can't see that you are sufficiently motivated to address our reasonable editorial requests. Instead we have been subjected to a stream of unjustified and offensive comments usually in the form of *ad hominem* attacks, with a beguiling offer to fix whatever it is we want, although this is never done.

We will be advertising for, and offering the review to, a fresh group who is prepared to work with us to get this published in the Cochrane library.

You are of course free to take whatever work you have undertaken to date and find another journal to publish it. If you do that could you please do us the courtesy of acknowledging our editorial support.

You are also free to appeal this decision with the Editor-in-Chief in London, who is copied in.

Chris Del Mar
Cochrane ARI Group Coordinating Editor

Comments by Harri Hemilä 2017-3-10

“Instead we have been subjected to a stream of unjustified and offensive comments usually in the form of ad hominem attacks, with a beguiling offer to fix whatever it is we want, although this is never done.”

First, Chris did not give any examples of “*ad hominem attacks*”. Before Chris' email, I had sent responses to Mark Jones' comments on my vitamin C and pneumonia review. In my responses I described, for example, that some of Mark Jones' comments were inconsistent with the Cochrane Handbook.

http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/hemila/CP/MarkJones_pneu_responses.pdf

Is that kind of response the “ad hominem attack” that Chris Del Mar is writing about. Am I not allowed to write responses and point out problems in Mark Jones' comments. If Mark Jones has not done his homework, am I not allowed to point that out in my responses to his criticisms. This is not clear from Chris Del Mar's rejection email.

Second, Chris' statement “*although this is never done*” is simply false.

See the two of our responses to July and Oct 2016 with the ARI office.

We followed the majority of the instructions, and for the remaining we mainly asked for clarifications since some of the instructions were not clear:

http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/hemila/CC/ARI_July2016_responses.pdf

http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/hemila/CC/ARI_Oct2016_responses.pdf

There is no justification for Chris' statement “*never done*”.

Chris Del Mark's request “*could you please do us the courtesy of acknowledging our editorial support*” is quite ironic given that we asked for clarifications for some of the ARI group instructions but had problems in getting them. As to the ARI group instructions on the style and presentation details, such support is relevant only in the Cochrane context to meet the details of requirements.

In January 2017, ARI office had given us time until 18 April 2017, but without any clear reasons Chris Del Mar decided to reject our review well before that deadline, without even reading our responses to CEU comments and considering whether our responses are sound or not:

http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/hemila/CC/CEU_responses.pdf

In his earlier 16 December email, Chris Del Mar wrote:

“... leads at the very least to delay, and possibly rejection of your work; and for us editorially because we hate delay, and finding another set of authors is time-consuming.”

Given that our review on vitamin C for the common cold has a history to the late 1990s, so that the first version was published in 2000

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10796569>

and an extensively revised version in 2004

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15495002>

and that we had used over a year of work in the 2016 updating of the review, I cannot see that a reasonable top priority in the evaluation of our update is to avoid any delays. Our review update is long (182 pages in the PDF format), and proper evaluation of its scientific validity takes its time. I do not consider that avoiding delay is a scientifically justified highest priority.

Avoiding delay is a reasonable priority for newspapers, but not for updating a review that has a history of over a decade, when there are no scientific concerns about the validity of the preceding 2013 version:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23440782>