- 'Choosing images for sharing evidence' is a resource we have developed for anyone who needs to choose images for a dissemination product based on any Cochrane Review, or other products (e.g. news items for websites, images in tweets).
- It has been developed with help of global advisory group and additional colleagues, with the support of Cochrane's Central KT team
- The guide is based on, & consistent with, Cochrane's dissemination checklist

Here are some images used alongside a recent news story which ran in the British media about how over 50s are 'rushing' to book holidays after having their COVID-19 vaccination. These examples bring to the fore lots of the challenges we're presented with when we're choosing images for Cochrane products. They also signpost to some of the solutions.
Which is the best to accompany this story?
Which is the poorest image?

Some of the issues:
- One of the things we need to think about is the **appropriateness of an image in a given context, and we need to show best practice** – in this example, given the current context of the pandemic, there's a problem with showing people who aren't socially distancing (for example, the people on the bus, but also, within the detail of the image of the street cafes – on close inspection people aren't distancing in the background). This risks us looking out of touch and also out of step with public health messaging. A couple of the images – the couple on the beach and that of people arriving at the airport do this quite nicely – showing people wearing masks for example.
- A couple of other issues. We need to use images that are **realistic and relatable,** and also that **demonstrate diversity**. In the coach image for example, the people are too old for the demographic we're talking about (clearly much older than over 50s) and they are all white. Similar criticism could be made of the image of the lady being vaccinated. On the other hand, some images – such as that with the couple on the beach, do better at representing diversity.
- The coach image also is problematic because it has an **exaggerated / inappropriate emotional tone** (others have much more neutral, realistic expressions and tone)
- Finally, showing someone vaccinated may seem like a safe choice. However, this specific example would be best **avoided because it includes a brand name** (in this case, Boots).
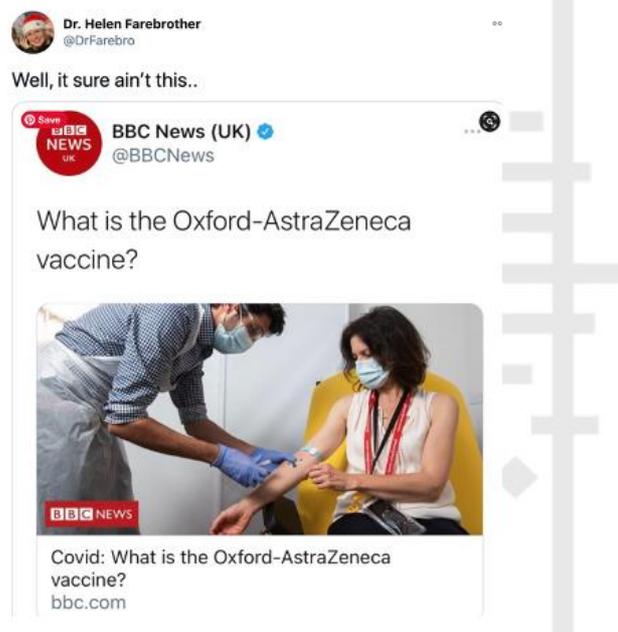
- Image choice really matters. Images have impact.
- The example here, an image used to accompany a BBC news article about the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was met with derision on social media – notably by health professionals.
- Well-chosen images can help people understand & engage with text OR put off. If you get image choice wrong, it can undermine confidence and trust in both the information you're sharing and the organisation itself. As a health organization, it's especially important that we accurately represent health and healthcare topics.

Contents

- Here is an overview of what's included in the guide.
- This presentation will go through some of the items in the guide – using one or two examples to illustrate some of the items but the presentation is a comprehensive overview. Many items have multiple aspects to them – so it's a good idea to look at the full guide.
- The checklist included in the guide has separate items, but there is lots of overlap – when choosing images, you have to be thinking about a lot of things at once.

Technical guidance

Item 1. Choose an image that you have permission to use

Item 2. Choose a sufficiently high-resolution image

Item 13. Ensure the image is not distorted and the main subject is not obscured by other elements

Item 14. Make sure your images comply with accessibility standards

Item 15. Credit the image source

Appendix 1: Useful sources of images
Appendix 2: Guidance about image resolution and size
Appendix 4: Adding alt text to images

The guide includes advice on technical aspects of using images (but this is not covered in detail in this presentation). This includes advice on ensuring you have: the correct permissions to use an image, that it's of sufficient resolution and not fuzzy or distorted, that you add an appropriate text description of images for visually impaired people, and that you credit the image where appropriate.

Appendix 1 of the guide has lots of good examples of sources of images, many of which are free and some of which are healthcare-specific (e.g. realistic vaccination photos from The American Academy of Pediatrics).

Now, we begin to look at some of the items in the checklist.

This item is about involving your target audience and seeking their feedback. This might be as simple as showing the image to someone with relevant expertise.

At Cochrane UK, when we were preparing a blog about treatment for neonatal jaundice, we initially picked the image on the left. We thought this might be suitable, but we knew we should check with Katie, the paediatrician who had written the blog.

Katie said:

"The picture is nice but that is quite an old-fashioned phototherapy lamp". So, we asked her to search for images in a stock library. She found many images showing phototherapy being used incorrectly – one even showed a baby dressed under phototherapy! She was keen to show best practice. That was a problem with some otherwise nice images of babies lying on their fronts – because the babies were not obviously being monitored, which posed a safety concern.

She recommended the image on the right as she felt it accurately and safely represents phototherapy.

It's worth noting that in the stock library, the image was incorrectly labelled – it was inaccurately referred to UV light).

We are now more conscious that we may not realise what we don't know! Really small details matter – and errors can be quickly spotted by experts.

Item 3. … or use an image created or selected by a target audience member)

Sally chose this image: "Kintsugi; the image of mending a broken pot with precious metal acknowledges my experience of cancer surgery and how I have come to accept and live with the scars, inside and out. Joining a dragon boat crew of people affected by cancer has been part of my recovery – our new boat is named Kintsugi". Artwork: 'Scars Are Golden' by Mary Kamerer, is part of the Breast Cancer Art Project.

"SIGNPOSTING"

You might also consider using an image created or selected by a target audience member.

1) The image on the left is one of the images from art chosen by people who blogged for us about their experiences of cancer. Art can provide a powerful alternative to stock images. The bloggers were really pleased about being consulted over image choice – particularly important as they were sharing their own, very personal experiences of illness. Images part of representing their experiences in a way that felt right for them. The image was also made by someone with cancer – as part of an initiative known as the Breast Cancer Art Project.

2) The image in the centre was drawn by a Cochrane Consumer, to illustrate her experience as a carer, to accompany her blog on the topic.

3) The image on the right is one of the Migraine Art Collection, images created by people to represent their experience of migraine. Even when you're choosing an image created by a person with lived experience, it's still important to be mindful of other considerations. For example, when we were developing the guide we initially included a different piece from the Migraine Art Collection – which showed hands with exaggerated, long fingernails to depict the pain experience. But a member of the advisory group told us that in her location – Cameroon – the image would have connotations of witchcraft, and so could be off putting.

Item 4. Depict a diverse range of people (across your products and within products), to ensure wide representation and inclusivity

This item is about depicting a diverse range of people (across your products and within products), to ensure wide representation and inclusivity.

- If you use more than one image in a dissemination product or an image with more than one person, consider showing variation within the relevant population. This might include people of different ages, genders, ethnicities and body types – or perhaps not always showing family as a man, woman and children.
- Consider also using images of people with visible disabilities when illustrating topics that are not about disability, such as the image on the right, which includes a girl with one hand. This could be used to illustrate a review about exercise interventions for young people.

Item 5. Depict the evidence accurately (population, intervention and/or setting)

Example: Healthcare workers and infection prevention and control (IPC) for respiratory infectious diseases

"PPE Training in Sierra Leone" by USAID U.S. Agency for International Development is licensed under CC BY 2.0

"Florida National Guard" by The National Guard is licensed under CC BY 2.0

This item is about depicting the evidence accurately (population, intervention and/or setting).

It's about showing the right thing, being used in the right way, in the right setting – if in doubt check (with a healthcare professional, a person with lived experience, a review author/editor). A key thing here is that image should reflect the evidence (population/intervention/setting) the review authors actually found, rather than what they searched for. For example, if review authors looked for studies in children and adults, but only found studies in adults, choose images of adults only.

Be aware that:
Stock images which show healthcare equipment, health conditions and interventions may be inaccurate and/or inappropriately labelled. (As we saw with the earlier example of the baby having phototherapy).

The example shown on this slide is from colleagues in Cochrane Norway when illustrating a review on infection prevention & control measures among healthcare workers.

The image on the left was initially chosen to illustrate this review but healthcare professionals who were asked for feedback pointed out that it did not show good practice because people are shown touching their masks and goggles with gloved hands and wearing watches and jewellery. They also noted that the equipment shown is lighter than the equipment that would commonly be used. The picture on the right was approved to replace it. Another consideration here was not to show expensive equipment which would be unavailable in some settings.

This item is about avoiding images with misleading presentations of intervention effects or images that could appear to recommend a treatment
Images showing treatment effects could exaggerate benefits or harms, or the certainty of the evidence.
Let's think about this in relation to the topic of treatments for subfertility and assisted reproduction.

Of the images shown here, which would be your first choice of image to illustrate a review on treatments for subfertility or assisted reproduction?

- We think the **images of a woman looking at a pregnancy test and of the man comforting the sad woman are legitimate choices.**
- The woman is looking at a pregnancy test with a neutral expression, which does not suggest what the result might be, so this could be a good choice as . The sad couple may also be suitable – it doesn't particularly imply an effect of an intervention either way. Rather it could be seen as showing some people's experience of the health condition (subfertility) and the stress of undergoing treatment. Other suitable alternatives (not shown here) might include an image of a consultation with a health professional, or images showing other aspects of a person's experience of the health condition and treatment.
- The images of mum and baby and the couple with a baby scan picture could imply that the treatment will result in a pregnancy or a live birth. These are risky choices to illustrate a review on fertility treatments. Even if the treatment was shown to have beneficial effects, such as increasing the chance of having a live birth, this effect would not be experienced by *all* women having this treatment.
- As for the image with just the pregnancy test kit – often, showing equipment or a medical device relevant to a particular topic may be a safe way of avoiding implying anything about the effects of a treatment. However, in this case, the image is best avoided because it shows a brand name. This leads us on to the next item in the checklist…

This item is about avoiding depicting a particular brand or trade name of medications or equipment, as this could appear to endorse it or suggest vested interests.
Ensure that images of alternatives are accurate. In the example here, the medication comes as a white tablet – so the top right image would not be an appropriate alternative to the image showing the brand name (Ritalin), but we could use the bottom image.

Any questions so far?
Please type them in the chat
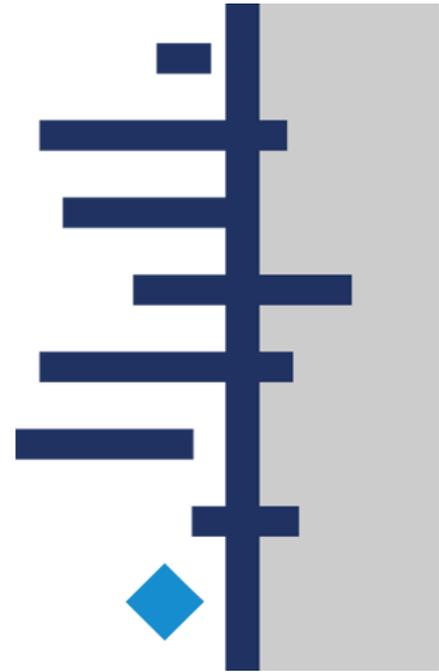
Item 8. Choose an image that is realistic and relatable for your target audience

Example: Cochrane Review on yoga for physical rehabilitation after stroke

This item is about making sure the people, activities and settings you show are realistic and relatable.

In the example shown here, we are thinking about illustrating a review on yoga for rehab after stroke.

Although, in both images, the people shown are the right demographic (people in their 60s) and carrying out the right intervention (yoga) for the review, the image on the left shows an unrealistic level of physical functioning. The image on the right may be more realistic and relatable for people rehabilitating after stroke.

Item 8. Choose an image that is realistic and relatable for your target audience

Example: Cochrane Reviews on common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety

"Sea of Google" by Karen Morley   "Albert György, Mélancolie" by act_inthecity is licensed under CC BY 2.0

In choosing images that are realistic and relatable, consider showing natural (and often neutral) facial expressions, appropriate for many healthcare situations - stock images, can feel posed and unrealistic.

Consider showing a realistic variety of experience and activity for people living with a health condition, including positive, neutral and negative aspects, and doing everyday things.

EXAMPLES: The examples here are possible images used to illustrate Cochrane Reviews on common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

There are many considerations when selecting images to share with evidence on mental health problems. One of these is triggers, we'll talk about this later on (item in its own right). It is important to use images that represent the variety of people's experience of mental health problems, not a corporate or clichéd version, and to avoid contributing to mental health stigma. The image on the top left is an example of a type of image sometimes called 'head-clutcher' images, commonly used to illustrate mental health problems by depicting someone holding their head in their hands. Although some people may find these relatable, this type of image has been criticised as perpetuating a stereotype of what mental distress looks like.

The other images may be preferable. Top right shows two people engaged in everyday activity, a contrast to the more commonly used images of a person isolated. It could suggest support and comfort, a positive image. Bottom left shows someone in a natural, subdued pose. This challenges a stereotype of mental distress being clearly visible. Images of art, including those created by people with lived experience of health conditions, can be highly impactful and relatable choices. In the bottom row, the middle image is an illustration done by someone in the UK about their own experience of living with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and seeking information about it, and on the right the sculpture 'Mélancolie' – a powerful example.

Item 9. Think about the appropriateness and acceptability of the image in different settings and cultures

Example: clinical encounters

"NEPAL" by (USAID) U.S. Agency for International Development is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

Think about the appropriateness and acceptability of the image in different settings and cultures Consider whether an image is going to be appropriate in the settings for which **your dissemination product is intended**. EXAMPLE: An image showing people touching (top) may be unacceptable in some cultures. Consider images (bottom row) that avoid showing physical touch (except of course, where touch is a necessary part of an intervention. For example, inserting a canula). If you are trying to illustrate something from a culture that is not your own, or with which you are not familiar, then you should consult someone with suitable knowledge or use an alternative.

Example: images for sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic

Be aware of current context. Major external events could make an image inappropriate. For example, images that would normally be appropriate – may be inappropriate in a pandemic (e.g. showing someone in a gym for a review on exercise, inappropriate when/if gyms are shut).

Item 10. Depict the topic sensitively, especially where the topic or findings may be upsetting, controversial or disappointing, and consider the context in which you are sharing the image

Example: School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse

Adult talking to child

Children and teacher in classroom

Crayons

School bus

Children in classroom (Africa)

Where a topic or findings may be upsetting, controversial or disappointing, think critically about the images you use and make sure you are sensitive to these issues. Check your choice with at least one other person.

While in Cochrane we do use images of children, there are ethical considerations, including whether they have given informed consent and would be happy for their photo to be used in any context. We have talked about this more in the guide.

Which one of these images would you choose to illustrate a review on school-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse?

Some questions to consider…

- Can the image help readers make a link with the topic?
- Is it necessary to show children's faces?
- Does it reflect the studies included in the review?
- Is it relevant for your setting?
- Does it show best practice?

1. 2. 3.

4. 5.

Here are some things to consider about that example.

- **Can the image help readers make a link with the topic?**

In a way, all of these images help readers make a link with the topic. However, there are good ways of doing this without showing children. The school bus and the crayons are possible ways to indicate the topic of school; images of a school building or empty classroom would be alternatives.

- **Is it necessary to show children's faces?**

If you do choose an image with children, it's best to avoid showing their faces. Especially where there are plenty of good alternatives to help people link the image with the subject matter. The image showing a class of children from behind would be a safer choice than images showing children's faces

- **Does it reflect the studies included in the review?**

Number 3, the image of crayons, suggests a link with children and possibly with school. They are the type often associated with young children; an age group included in this review. As for image 5, the studies in the Cochrane Review were conducted in North America, Europe, and Asia, so this image does not reflect the population actually studied.

- **Is it relevant for your setting?**

However, coming on to think about whether the image is relevant for your setting… if you were wanting to share this dissemination product in an African country, you might want to choose an image like number 5, as it reflects *your* setting.

- **Does it show best practice?**

Image number 1 is problematic because, as well as showing the girl's face, in the context of this review the girl and teacher could be seen to be discussing a disclosure of sexual abuse, but the image does not show best practice because another child is present.

This item is about avoiding images that stigmatize, reinforce stereotypes or are dehumanizing, such as images that crop out people's heads without a clear reason for this. The image on the right might be a positive, more respectful alternative.

Consider images that challenge stereotypes and offer positive alternatives. For example, consider showing both men and women, of different ethnicities, as nurses or surgeons, if that

reflects the reality of your geographical location. Be aware that minority ethnic groups are often depicted negatively in mass media, making it even more important that we challenge such depictions and offer positive alternatives.

Avoid images that could trigger unwanted feelings or behaviour

Triggers may produce uncomfortable feelings in people or prompt behaviours that they wish to avoid. These will be most obvious for (but not limited to) topics such as smoking cessation, alcohol and drug use, self-harm and a range of mental health disorders.

Example – It is very common for dissemination products about smoking cessation to include images of tobacco related products, but this can be triggering for people who smoke and for former smokers and is best avoided.

With regards to mental health – there is **some strict guidance: do not use images which could indicate a method or location of suicide or self-harm in any circumstance.** If in doubt, consider using an alternative such as an abstract image.

"Traumatic brain injury: is decompressive surgery worth the risks?" – (Evidently Cochrane blog)

Operating theatre

Patient in bed and doctor

Surgeons operating

Surgeons using operating microscope

Doctor speaking with patient's relatives

This final example hopefully ties together a lot of the issues we've been talking about – and lots of the items in the guide.

A subject like traumatic brain injury is difficult to illustrate – particularly when more than one image is needed (as we did for a blog on this topic aimed at families making this decision about a relative with traumatic brain injury).

Which of these 5 images might you choose to illustrate this topic?

Problems and considerations

- How could we show our target audience that this is relevant to them and without putting them off?
- Showing an accident scene could be distressing, as could showing a critically ill patient – plus it could be difficult to find one of someone with the right wound dressing, for example, and the right surrounding equipment. (e.g. woman in image number 2 is not realistic as a patient with traumatic brain injury).
- The operation is difficult to illustrate. Images we found were graphic and frightening or were textbook diagrams. Images 1, 3, and 4 are images you might consider. However, we felt number 1 felt quite cold and impersonal when we're trying to reach families. 3 doesn't look credible for this type of surgery whereas 4 could be credible. We asked the neurosurgeon who wrote this blog and he said number 4 shows the right equipment but doesn't show best practice as the surgeons' hair isn't fully covered.
- Image number 5 shows a discussion (family speaking with clinician). We did in fact use image number 5. We consulted with our neurosurgeon and he confirmed with us that the decision would most likely be made by a patient's loved ones, rather than the patient themselves.

Decision-making was an important element to show and alternatives to images showing people are these kinds of images here.

So, of these 4 images , which would you choose to illustrate this topic?

- The red shoes (image 2) indicate decision-making, but we felt it strikes the wrong emotional tone. It's important to not seem frivolous which such a sensitive topic. (We did use the image in a different blog, about a patient making choices about living with long-term conditions, but the image didn't feel suitable for *this* topic, about a patient who would be in intensive care.
- Image 3 feels a long way from the relevant setting of intensive care. We felt it wouldn't help our audience make an immediate link with the topic.
- Image 4 suggests balancing benefits and harms. However, it suggests a weighted decision (a risk that outweighs the benefits in this case) – we didn't want to suggest that this was the case.
- We choose image 2, showing the 'surgery' sign. It both suggests a hospital setting and the arrows going in different direction to the wards and to surgery suggests a choice. However, be aware that for translation purposes any image with words on can present a problem. Anyone translating the blog might choose the substitute the image for one that doesn't contain text.

Appendix 3 takes this example, and two others, of real dissemination products which were particularly challenging to illustrate. We explain our thought processes, the options we considered and the reasons for our final decisions. We'd encourage you to look through these.

Take-home points

1) **Consider every detail of an image**
2) **Check with someone with relevant expertise if you have any doubts**
3) **Please explore and use the guide to choosing images**

We welcome anyone to contact us with any examples of how they've used the guide, or how it's influenced your practice.

We hope that you can apply this learning to your own work and also be (better) able to spot issues with images you see in the news/media.

You can find the guide on the Cochrane Training website:
https://training.cochrane.org/sites/training.cochrane.org/files/public/uploads/Images%20Checklist%20for%20Evidence%20Dissemination%20-%20Final%2C%20version%201.0_2.pdf

**Any questions?
Please type them in the chat**