Virtual centre for improving oral health — vC-IOH

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The virtual Centre for Improving Oral Health Development Group*

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This month sees the launch of a new 'virtual centre' in the UK that aims to improve oral health through the application of evidence-based principles. The virtual centre has been developed by networking four of the groups that have the most experience of using evidence-based methods.

The virtual centre

The *virtual* 'Centre for Improving Oral Health through Evidence-Based Dentistry' (vC-IOH) has been established by a unique non-competitive networking of four UK units that have a long history in the advocacy and use of evidence-based methods. The core groups are:

- **CEBD** — the Centre for Evidence-Based Dentistry (Oxford): The CEBD provides training and disseminates information via both a website and this, the most widely distributed evidence-based dental journal, *Evidence-Based Dentistry*.
- **COHG** — the Cochrane Oral Health Group (Manchester): The Oral Health Group of the Cochrane Collaboration is an international group that undertakes systematic reviews of literature, covering all randomised controlled trials of oral health.

- **DHSRU** — the Dental Health Services Research Unit (Dundee, Scotland): Members of the unit have been involved in the development of evidence-based guidelines for the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, the Faculty of General Dental Practitioners (FGDP) and the National Institute of Clinical Excellence. DHSRU currently leads the development of the National Health Service's (NHS) Dental Clinical Care Pathways programme under the 'Options for Change' initiative in England.

- **WOHIU** — the Welsh Oral Health Information Unit (Cardiff, Wales): Members of the unit have been involved in several high-profile systematic reviews, most notably the York review of water fluoridation.¹ Currently WOHIU are responsible for leading development of the National Electronic Library for Health Oral Health Specialist Library.

The mission of the virtual centre

The mission of the vC-IOH is to:

- Identify and objectively synthesise, quality-assured best evidence on dental interventions and dental care of importance to the NHS, its staff and its patients.
- Ensure that this information is made readily accessible via a variety of formats, exploiting the potential of electronic knowledge services (for those who have them).
- Develop methods to package knowledge for the effective dissemination and implementation of research knowledge to maintain and improve oral health.
- Inform NHS dental policy, service and education interests on evidence-based dentistry issues.

The centre's non-competitive collaboration seeks to utilise the skills and contacts of the individual units and thus promote the sharing of information in the NHS. This should help avoid duplication

of effort and ensure value for money. The improved communication and integration of activities has already started, to avoid the duplication of systematic reviews and facilitate a more predictable link between research and policy.

The vC-IOH has been involved in discussions with the Department of Health in the UK, the Shadow Strategic Health Authority (currently Dental Practice Board) and the wider National Electronic Library for Health team. One of the key aims of the vC-IOH is to help plan and build the proposed National Oral Health Knowledge Service with a series of partners.

The vC-IOH will endeavour to do meet its aims by harnessing known expertise within the NHS, and through alliances with primary care and a number of knowledge-related organisations. These include:

- the British Society for Dental Research (BSDR),
- the British Dental Association (BDA),
- the FGDP,
- international evidence-based dentistry groups:
 - the International Association of Dental Research (IADR), and
 - the International Dental Federation (FDI).

The Centre will also link with the new Oral Health Unit of the English National Primary Care Research and Development Centre: these links will be co-ordinated by a specially-created NHS Dental Knowledge Delivery Team chaired by the Chief Dental Officer (CDO) for England.

The *virtual* Centre has been working on long-term planning with CDOs in the UK prior to its launch. In the short term, the vC-IOH will be working with England's CDOs to optimise the ways in which various strands of the modernisation process for primary dental care in England can be brought together. The aim of

this is to achieve high-quality, evidence-based, patient-centred, information-technology-supported care that both maintains and improves oral health.

The Centre looks forward to this challenge. The lessons learned from this non-competitive approach will provide object lessons for more international co-ordination of evidence-based activity.

1. A systematic review of public water fluoridation. NHS Center for Reviews and Dissemination. Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD) 2000 (CRD Report 18): 243. (www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/fluorid.htm)

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Key to evidence graphic used in Evidence-based Dentistry with examples of study designs for Therapy/prevention/aetiology and harm. Study designs for evidence levels will be different for prognosis/diagnosis etc. (See Evidence-based Dentistry 2003;4:p17-18)

Evidence Graphic	Evidence-level	Therapy/Prevention /Aetiology/Harm
1A	SR (with homogeneity ^a) of RCTs
1B	Individual RCT with narrow confidence interval (CI)
2B	SR (with homogeneity ^a) of cohort studies
2C	Individual cohort studies (including low quality RCT eg < 80% follow-up)
3A	SR (with homogeneity ^a) of Case-Controlled Studies

a By homogeneity we mean a systematic review free of worrisome variations (heterogeneity) in the direction and degree of results between individual studies. Not all systematic reviews with statistically significant heterogeneity need be worrisome, and not all worrisome heterogeneity need be statistically significant.