

Next steps for *e_Musk*

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e_Musk1 in 2001 in Ferrara, Italy was a most enjoyable meeting—whether it will become the forerunner for promotion of evidence based practice in the management of musculoskeletal conditions will depend on what we do as a result.

What is clear so far is that, amongst other things:

- there is an enormous existing, and growing, disease, and societal, burden due to musculoskeletal conditions;
- clinical practice does not always follow EBM principles;
- the quality of some of the research leaves a lot to be desired;
- funding for research is hard to come by; and
- patients are not at the center of health care policy making, service planning and delivery of care—professional and technological considerations dominate.

The challenges, therefore, are great. Not doing anything, however, is not an option—not only because, as potential consumers of health care, we all want good quality and affordable health care for ourselves but also because if we do not do something then others, funders and regulators, will impose standards and sanctions.

A follow up meeting was held in Lyon, France in October 2001, and it was agreed that the publication of this supplement should be used to further the aims of *e_Musk*. In doing so we need to ensure that we respect the work of various existing entities and be aware that organisation and delivery of services will be different in different countries—the local context is very important. The guiding principle for any international collaboration, therefore, should be ‘Adding Value’; together we should do what we can not do alone.

e_Musk has clearly identified the need for a forum for like minded people to network and interact. The long-term goal of *e_Musk* should be patient-centeredness and bringing down the professional barriers. This will require focussed primary and secondary research and translating the results into clinical practice—a hugely ambitious agenda. Short-term goals could include organisation of meetings, cooperation in research and teaching projects.

We could consider the creation of a common database of musculoskeletal trials, as done in the mental health area (the psi-tri database). This could be potentially a source of European funding requests. We could start this ourselves by sharing existing databases and in particular bringing together the work of the various Cochrane groups working in this field.

Several EBM teaching projects have been started around the world, but very few are in the musculoskeletal area. We could share, and develop, teaching resources for relevant clinical presentations on prevention / diagnosis / therapy / rehabilitation. We could create a network of various centres interested in EBM teaching in this field whereby each centre could contribute original information on one or more teaching subjects, but could use the shared information form all other centres for local educational purposes.

To start the process, we are setting up an *e_Musk* Coordinating Centre at the University of Teesside in Middlesbrough, UK. We are having further discussions about the practical arrangements and hope to finalise them at the Cochrane Colloquium in August 2002.

In the meantime, we ask that you consider what we have outlined and let us have suggestions on

what we should do from here on. Send your comments to

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