

# The Cochrane Airways Group Register of Trials: a unique resource

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## Background

The Cochrane Airways Group is review group of the Cochrane Collaboration, an international, not-for-profit research organisation. Part of the remit of a Review Group is to develop and maintain a register, or database, of trial reports relating to the scope of that Group. The Cochrane Airways Group Register (CAGR) contains reports of trials in airways diseases, including asthma, COPD, bronchiectasis, obstructive sleep apnoea and interstitial lung disease, and is published in the CENTRAL database on the *Cochrane Library*. The CAGR is searched for eligible trials for each systematic review conducted by Airways Group review authors.

The Register is compiled through systematic electronic searches of a set of core databases (Table 1). This set of databases has been established through search experience and has been found to yield the highest number of trial reports relevant to the Group. Other databases are searched on a ad hoc basis when time allows.

Database	Frequency of search
MEDLINE (via Ovid)	weekly
EMBASE (via Ovid)	weekly
CENTRAL on the Cochrane Library	Monthly
PsychInfo (via Ovid)	Monthly
CINAHL (via Ebsco)	Monthly
AMED (via Ebsco)	Monthly

Table 1 Core set of databases and search frequency

The search strategies that are used to identify the trials have been developed over time to include the index terms and keywords that retrieve the highest number of trials (high sensitivity). This means that a large number of references are discarded. The title, abstract and keywords of each downloaded reference are read and if the reference is relevant to the scope of the Group it is coded for health condition and study design and added to the Register.

Conference abstracts also make an important contribution to the AGR. The abstract books of key national and international respiratory conferences are manually handsearched for reports of trials to ensure that many trials which never reach full publication are identified. Table 2 shows the core set of conference abstracts and the years that have been searched by the Airways Group. Other years have been searched by other Cochrane Groups, and made available on the Cochrane Library.

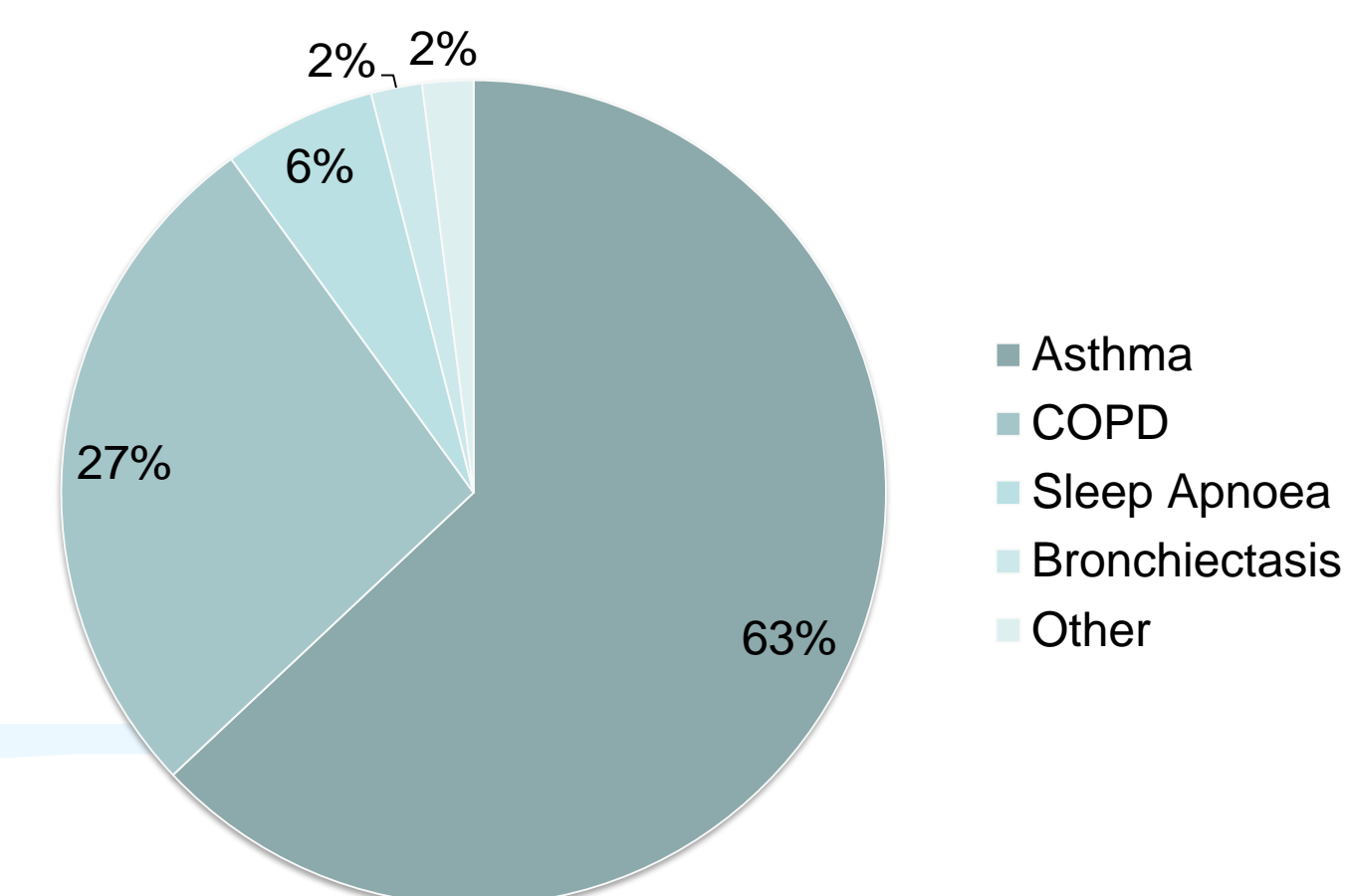
Conference name	Years searched
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI)	2001-2010
American Thoracic Society (ATS)	2001-2010
Asia Pacific Society of Respiriology (APSR)	2004-2009
British Thoracic Society Winter Meeting (BTS)	2000-2009
Chest Meeting	2003-2009
European Respiratory Society (ERS)	1992, 2000-2009
International Primary Care Respiratory Group Congress (IPCRG)	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010
Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ)	1999, 2001-2010

Table 2 Core set of handsearched conference abstracts

## Results

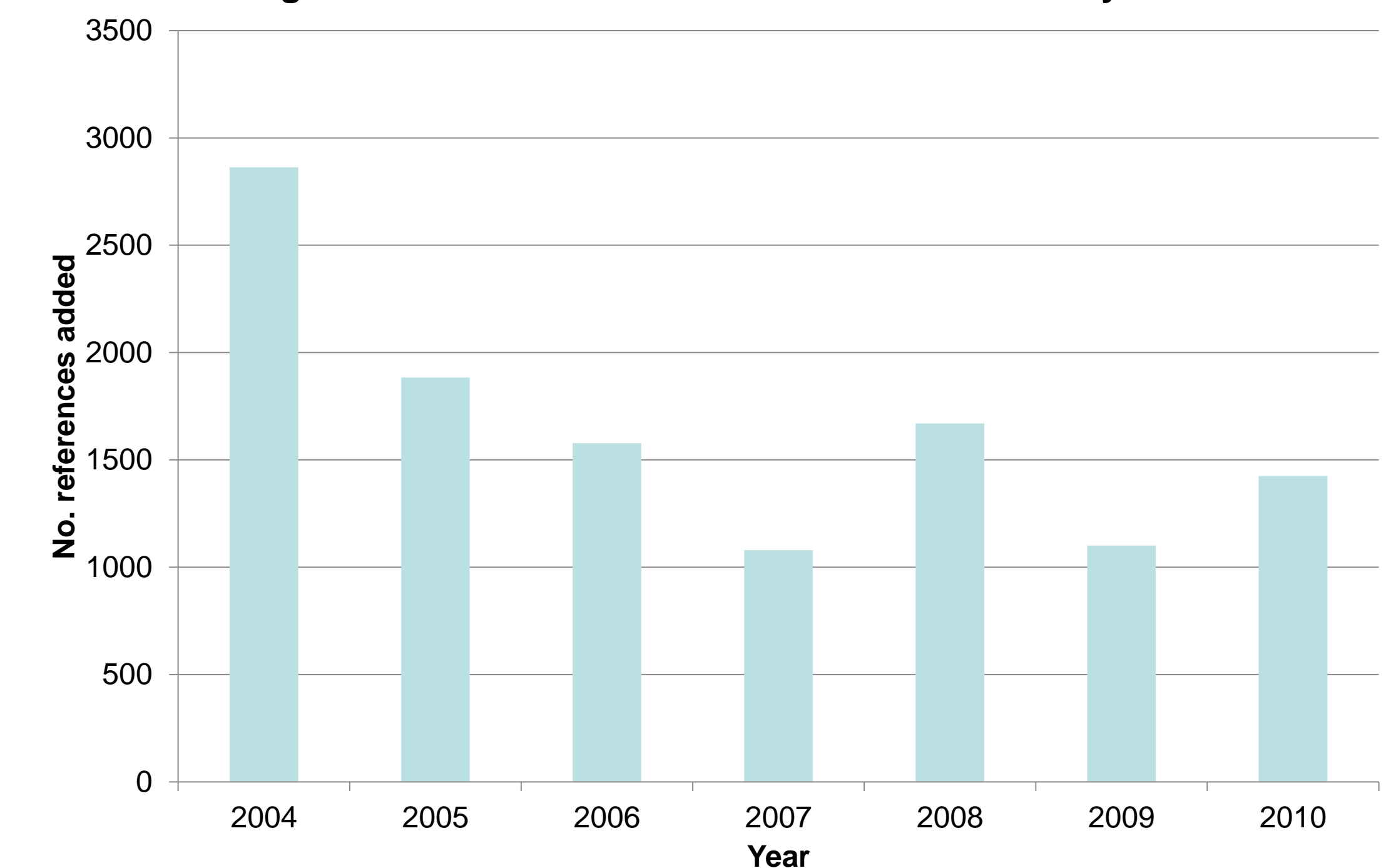
The AGR currently holds almost 28 000 references to trial reports. The majority of these are reports of asthma trials (64%) and COPD trials (27%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Number of references by condition (%)



On average, 3-5% of the references identified from electronic database searches are judged to be suitable for inclusion in the Register, which equates to approximately 1000 new references each year. In addition, 700-900 relevant conference abstracts are identified each year through manual searching. Figure 2 shows the total number of references from all sources that have been added to the AGR each year since 2004. The number of references seems to be levelling off, with a peak in 2008 and 2010. This is probably due to increased handsearching activities in those years.

Figure 2: Total references added to the AGR each year



The AGR is searched for each Airways Group systematic review title and is the primary source of references to studies for almost 230 published Cochrane Reviews. A further 34 reviews are in progress to which the AGR will also make an important contribution. As the records in the AGR have been screened and only added to the Register if they are randomised or controlled clinical trials falling within the Airways Group scope, this significantly reduces the work load of a review author by saving them the job of trawling through thousands of references thrown up by a MEDLINE and EMBASE systematic search.

The AGR has also been searched for external organisations, such as the Canadian Thoracic Society and the World Health Organisation, to help them develop guidelines.

## Conclusion

The Airways Group Register of Trials is a unique resource and huge effort goes in to maintaining it. The Register makes a valuable contribution to the production and updating of Cochrane Reviews, and to the wider respiratory research community, by collecting together the evidence base of randomised and controlled clinical trials in obstructive airways disease.

## Further information

- [1] The Cochrane Collaboration <http://www.cochrane.org>
- [2] The Cochrane Library <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com/>
- [3] The Cochrane Airways Group <http://www.airways.cochrane.org/>