Spotting Flaws in Animal Alternatives Searches

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Look to the Regulations:


- Based on Policy #12, obvious Red Flags are raised when a search does not include:
  - Name(s) of the databases searched
  - Date the search was performed
  - Time period covered by the search
  - Search strategy

Additional Red Flags:

- The search was completed at the last minute
  - Searching can be time consuming, so last minute searches may be incomplete
- Only 1 database was searched
  - Increased bias if only 1 database is searched
  - Note that PubMed and OVID Medline are basically the same database
- Terms are only for painful aspects
  - Should include terms for distressful aspects too
- The term “alternative” is the only term combined with the procedure term(s)
  - Should include terms for actual alternatives
- Keywords listed are not relevant to protocol
  - Was the search copied and pasted from an old protocol?
- Keywords and concepts are linked in an incorrect manner
  - Have Boolean operators AND, OR, & NOT been used correctly? OR for synonyms; AND between concepts; and NOT with care
- Search doesn’t cover an adequate time period (5-10 years)
  - Appropriate time period will vary with topic and is a judgment call
- Found zero results
  - Most likely indicates poor keywords and/or use of Boolean operators
- No word variation
  - The search should include: synonyms, truncation, subject terms, and generic and trade names of drugs

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