

“Reporting registers” for animal studies help science - and animal welfare

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The use of animals for scientific purposes must be restricted to the level that is absolutely necessary and must meet high ethical standards. Despite numerous successes in the development of alternative methods for animal experiments it is not yet possible to forego tests on animals - including in medical research - on the basis of the present state of science and technology.

Registers for animal studies are one way to assure and improve both scientific quality and animal welfare. Planned animal experiments can be entered in these directories including basic information about the protocols and experimental procedures that will be applied. Three of these “reporting registers” have now published common requirements in the specialist journal “PNAS Nexus” ([link to the study](#)) including “preclinicaltrials.eu” “OSF registry” as well as Animalstudyregistry.org”. The latter is hosted at the German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals (Bf3R), which is part of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR).

Directories for clinical studies, i.e. for experiments with human trial participants, are used as established models for the “preclinical” registers of animal experiments. The largest register is “clinicaltrials.gov”, which was established in 2000 and already has over 400,000 studies listed. Regulatory authorities for drugs and medical devices as well as specialist medical journals all demand registration of clinical studies before the start of the trial.

In science, “positive” study results are sometimes considered to be of higher quality than those that do not confirm a previous and commonly accepted hypothesis. The result is that studies that do not produce the desired result are not published. Studies - and therefore also animal experiments - are consequently repeated elsewhere unnecessarily. Even studies with a “negative” result are useful, owing to their scientific significance. Prior registration of animal experiments therefore promotes scientific transparency and quality as well as animal welfare (fewer experiments, better housing conditions). Registration takes place purely on a voluntary basis.

The three registers of animal experiments identify the following as common objectives and standards:

- Access to the entries should be public and free of charge both for the general public and for the scientists involved. They may be granted a retention period, in which certain data are not yet freely available.
- The organisation responsible for the registration database must disclose its owners and funding sources.
- Any prior registration is saved with the date of receipt, as well as subsequent additions.
- The register data must be secure. This is particularly important, if a retention period has been agreed, during which only certain parts of the study become openly available.
- Secure storage of the data over the coming decades must be guaranteed.
- Studies that are registered in advance must be clearly identifiable and quotable online, for example with a separate internet address (DOI).
- The prior registration of the planned study and the results should be linked.
- Certain minimum information should be requested on registration. In the case of animal experiments this may be the animal species, strain and gender, as well as the methods used.

About Bf3R

The German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals (Bf3R) was founded in 2015 and is an integral part of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). It coordinates nationwide activities with the goals of restricting animal experiments to only those that are essential and guaranteeing the best possible protection for laboratory animals. Moreover, it intends to stimulate research activities and encourage scientific dialogue.

About BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. The BfR advises the Federal Government and the States ('Laender') on questions of food, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.