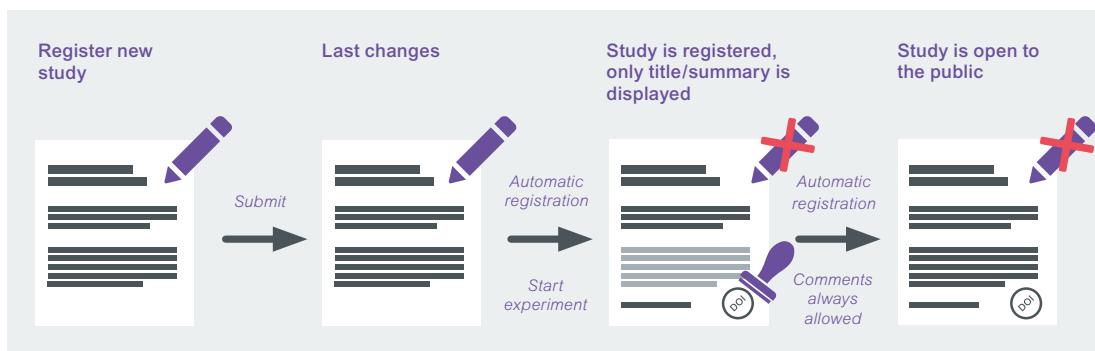


Better for man and mouse

The Animal Study Registry is intended to make science more transparent and to increase the protection of laboratory animals





Studies are the fruits that ripen on the tree of science. But not all of them are palatable. Some are, in their own way, spoiled and covered with mould. Unlike real fruit, however, we cannot tell if a scientific study is good quality at first glance. But the discussion about research quality is in full swing.

The list of shortcomings includes the fact that scientific results often cannot be confirmed. Unwanted results are brushed under the carpet or embellished. One way to improve the situation are study registries – a new one for animal experiments went online at the German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals at the BfR in January 2019.

Entry in the registry helps to organise our thoughts

In the online and worldwide available “Animal Study Registry” (ASR), a researcher can register a planned animal experiment quickly, free of charge and protected by copyright. A form with detailed questions helps sort ideas, develop the study design and choose the right methods and statistical procedures. In order to protect intellectual property, studies can be made inaccessible for up to five years before they are published. “We are happy to support scientists in planning their studies,” says Dr. Bettina Bert, the veterinarian responsible for the study registry. “It’s not about control; it’s about achieving reliable results.”

Scientists who register are more credible

The study registry is not only helpful when it comes to the technical details of an experiment; scientists who register their experiment also increase their credibility. “The study is therefore trustworthy and increases in value,” says Dr. Céline Heinl, who is in charge of the ASR together with Bettina Bert. Bert and Heinl hope that the ASR will improve the quality of scientific work and, in addition, encourage the publication of supposedly unwelcome results. It is precisely those experiments that do not produce the desired result that may contain important information for others, if they are published. Better and more transparent – i.e. comprehensible – research is one of ASR’s goals. The other is the protection of laboratory animals. The two cannot be separated. According to a report about animal experiment registries in “Nature” magazine, it is estimated that between a third and a half of all animal experiments are never

published. This “great silence” not only distorts scientific perception, it also means that animals are wasted in experiments.

Animal welfare and good science hand in hand

In contrast, an experiment recorded in the ASR cannot be concealed. Anyone who registers an animal experiment in the ASR commits to animal welfare – also because the subject of animal husbandry plays an important role in the ASR. It is based on guidelines for animal experiments established by the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs), the British scientific organisation committed to replacing and reducing animal experiments and reducing the stress of the animals upon which experiments are carried out.

Registries for biomedical studies have long been setting a precedent. The largest is the U.S. “Clinicaltrials.gov”. It was launched in 2000 and now has more than 300,000 entries for clinical trials. Therefore, studies in which human subjects participate.

No obligation to make an entry

As of yet, the situation has been quite different with animal experiments. Entry in the ASR is voluntary. There is no means of pressure to force registration. Nevertheless: “As a federal institute dealing with animal welfare, we are the right institution to set up this kind of study registry reliably and in the long term,” says Bettina Bert.

The task now is to make the scientific community aware of the directory and to convince it of its usefulness. A long road ahead – but not without the prospect of success. The voluntary study register “Open Science Framework” has already recorded more than 30,000 entries since its foundation in 2012. “It is highly regarded by psychologists and social scientists,” says Bert. Who says that ASR cannot become just as popular in research that works with animals? □

More information:
www.animalstudyregistry.org

Bert B., Heinl C., Chmielewska J., Schwarz F., Grune B., Hensel A., Greiner M., Schönfelder G. (2019) Refining animal research: The Animal Study Registry. PLoS Biol 17(10): e3000463. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000463>