

Letters Correspondance

EMBASE and MEDLINE searches

The recent article by Wilkins et al on EMBASE versus MEDLINE for family medicine searches¹ clearly illustrates the importance of searching both databases when a comprehensive search is needed, for example, when writing grant proposals or preparing systematic reviews. College of Family Physicians of Canada members who do not have access to EMBASE should be aware that they can request EMBASE searches from the College's library service. All members are entitled to five free literature searches per year—searches of MEDLINE, EMBASE, or any combination of many databases.

Wilkins et al used Ovid MEDLINE; I usually use PubMed MEDLINE. It is interesting that

when the same search strategy Wilkins et al used for their sample search on urinary tract infections is run in PubMed MEDLINE, it yields 73 references, as opposed to the 30 references from the Ovid MEDLINE search. The details appear in **Table 1**. Seventy-three references retrieved from PubMed MEDLINE compares favourably with the 65 retrieved from EMBASE in Wilkins and colleagues' article.

I believe that a large part of the difference in number of articles retrieved from the two MEDLINE databases is due to the different ways the "therapy" subheading is handled. PubMed explodes the subheading "therapy" as well as the MeSH heading; Ovid MEDLINE does not seem to do this.

I have not made a detailed comparison of Ovid MEDLINE, PubMed MEDLINE, and EMBASE results, and I continue to believe that it is important to search both MEDLINE and EMBASE when doing a comprehensive literature search.

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Table 1. Sample search using Ovid MEDLINE and PubMed MEDLINE

SEARCH STEP	SEARCH STRATEGY	OVID MEDLINE (SEARCH REPORTED JUNE 2005)	PUBMED MEDLINE (SEARCH DONE JULY 2005)
1	exp Family practice/*	40 212	44 633
2	exp Physicians, family/	8438	9667
3	exp Primary health care/	34 257	40 394
4	1 or 2 or 3	77 428	88 109
5	exp Urinary tract infections/th (therapy)	924	11 951
6	exp Urinary tract infections/	27 387	28 716
7	exp Therapeutics/	1 488 843	1 692 795
8	6 and 7	5266	5797
9	5 or 8	5855	14 706
10	4 and 9	82	219
11	limit 10 to English	75	183
12	limit 11 to human	74	182
13	limit 12 to yr=1992-2003	30	73
14	limit to MEDLINE subset **	n/a	73

*exp—explode command is performed by default in PubMed MEDLINE, so search strategy was Family practice/, Physicians, family/, etc.

**PubMed includes references other than MEDLINE references

Reference

1. Wilkins T, Gillies RA, Davies K. EMBASE versus MEDLINE for family medicine searches. Can MEDLINE searches find the forest or a tree? *Can Fam Physician* 2005;51:848-9. Available from: www.cfpc.ca/cfp/2005/Jun/vol51-jun-research-1.asp. Accessed 2005 August 9.