Identification of ethics committees based on authors' disclosures

A cross-sectional analysis of articles published in the
European Journal of Anaesthesiology (EJA)

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BACKGROUND Publication in scientific journals requires that articles on human experimentation report ethics approval (EA) by a competent ethics committee (EC). Since 2010, the EJA requires that five specific items related to the EC are mentioned in an article: 1) name of EC, 2) address of EC, 3) name of chair of EC, 4) protocol number, 5) date of approval.

OBJECTIVES To quantify the degree of adherence to these requirements in articles published in the EJA. To check whether the information provided allows contacting the relevant EC.

METHODS All articles published in the EJA during 2011 and requiring ethics EA were identified. For each article, we checked how many of the required items were reported. We then attempted **to identify the relevant EC** through a web search based on the reported information. For each identified EC, we tried **to contact the EC** by Email or letter, and to verify whether the EC had actually given approval for the respective study.

RESULTS

EC = ethics committee, EA = ethical approval

CONCLUSIONS 44% only of articles published in the EJA in 2011 and requiring EA reported on all five items. We were able to identify 59% only of EC based on the published information. Reporting all five items significantly increased the chance of identification of the competent EC.

26% of identified EC were unable to confirm EA of the respective study. The ability to confirm EA by a competent EC was significantly related with reporting of the five items.

More research is needed to determine which information should be reported in an original article to enable identification of the competent ethics committees in case of queries.

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