

Evaluation of the Conference Proceedings and Peer-reviewed Publications for Vaccine-related Studies Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners from 1988 to 2003

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Introduction

Conference proceedings are a common source of information for veterinarians. However conference proceedings tend to be brief and not subject to peer review. Studies in human medicine suggest that the results from conference proceedings tend to be “rosier” than subsequent peer reviewed publications suggesting that reliance on conference proceedings may result in an over-estimation of efficacy. The objective of this study was to compare results presented in conference proceedings with subsequent publications.

Materials and Methods

Our test base was vaccine studies reported in the *Proceedings of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners Annual Conference* from 1988 to 2003. The study had five steps: 1) identification of conference proceedings using tables of contents, 2) elimination of conference proceedings with insufficient information to compare to journal articles, 3) identification of citations in electronic database that may match the conference proceedings, 4) elimination of citations not likely to match the conference proceedings based on 1) author search, 2) date of publication, 3) content, 5) comparison of data extracted from remaining conference proceedings with journal article.

Results

Sixty-eight conference proceedings reported vaccine studies from 1988 to 2003. Only six conference proceedings could be associated with a journal article. Only slight differences in the reported designs or results were noted. The abstract-to-publication ratio was 6 of 68 (8.8%). The positive finding ratio for conference proceeding articles was 56% (38/68) and 66% (4/6). About 30% of conference proceedings failed to report the most fundamental features of a vaccine assessment such as description of the vaccine, the number of animals, if there was a control group, and the age, weight and sex of the animals and challenge material if applicable.

Significance

The purpose of this study was to compare results reported in conference proceedings with journal articles of the same material. The noted differences were very minor. However subsequent publication is very uncommon, suggesting many research findings are not subject to or fail the peer review process. In human medicine abstract-to-publication ratios are rarely less than 40%. It is unclear what the implications of a low abstract-to-publication ratio are in veterinary science.