10 Guidelines for Responsible Literature Searching

1. Responsible literature searching requires locating primary literature, preferably from peer-reviewed journals, and critical evaluation of the information contained in the primary literature to answer the research inquiry or clinical question.

2. Responsible literature searching requires knowledge of the structure, function and limitations of each library database/online resource and knowledge of other biomedical resources available for online literature searching.

3. Responsible literature searching requires knowledge of common structural elements shared by bibliographic databases and application of the appropriate search methods to retrieve the relevant primary literature. The Database Comparison Chart and the Effective Database Searching Visual Map are helpful tools to compare databases.

4. Because of their unique coverage and indexing of the primary literature, it may be necessary to search several major bibliographic databases to complete a responsible literature search.

5. When completing a responsible drug or chemical information literature search, consideration should be given to consulting electronic and print tertiary sources and to search the appropriate drug, chemistry and pharmaceutical databases. Contact Mayo’s Drug Information Service for specific drug questions such as drug dosing, interactions, etc.

6. Evidence-based health care resources (EBHC) such as the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews assist in identifying studies that provide strong scientific evidence. Consideration should be given to using EBHC resources in conjunction with the major bibliographic databases when completing a responsible literature search.

7. Consider using cited reference and related article searching when completing a responsible literature search. They should be used in conjunction with keyword and controlled vocabulary searching.

8. Alerting services are effective current awareness tools and assist in updating a responsible literature search.

9. Mayo Clinic reference librarians are knowledgeable about database vocabulary and structure, and can assist in completing a responsible literature search in any biomedical database.

10. A responsible literature search may benefit from peer review and include documentation of the sources searched and the search methods used in the literature review.