Using PubMed to Find Clinical Trials that Evaluate the Efficacy of a New Drug

Step 1: Get to PubMed
Beginning on the library’s homepage (http://medlib.bu.edu), click out to PubMed. [See arrow.]

You will be prompted to log in with your BU username and password. Although PubMed is a
free database, going to it through the library’s website will provide you with a link to the full text
of the items we own.
Step 2: Run Your Search

Since new drugs often do not yet have a MeSH term assigned to them and the newest articles have not yet been tagged with MeSH terms, you will want to run your search using “natural language” terms, in this case galantamine and pharmacology and therapeutic use. [See top arrow.]

Running our search for these “natural language” terms means our results will be articles that mention all of those terms somewhere in the record, such as in the title or abstract. Using the terms pharmacology and therapeutic use helps to target studies that review the efficacy of the drug we are researching.

This search gives us 624 results. [See bottom arrow in photo above.]
Step 3: Find the Filter You Need

The average person can handle going through about 100 results. We thus want the first 100 results we go through to be as targeted to our topic as possible. Since we are specifically looking for a clinical trial, it would be helpful to further narrow our results down to include only articles discussing a clinical trial.

The filters found on the left-hand side of our search results can help us further narrow our results down. [See area indicated by the three arrows.]
PubMed only displays a few of the many filter options. To see more of them, click on “Show Additional Filters.” [See arrow.]

Check off the other options you would like to see with the checkboxes [see top arrow], and then click “show” [see bottom arrow.]
This does not turn on the filters yet, it just now displays them as an option for you.

Similarly, some of these filter categories contain more options than you see displayed. If you click on “customize,” you can select more options to be displayed to you. [See top and bottom arrows.]
For instance, under “Article types,” in addition to “Clinical Trial” and “Review,” you can see that there are many more article types. You can even narrow it down to the specific phase of a clinical trial. [See arrow.]

We want to keep our search a bit more broad than that right now, so we will just use “clinical trial,” which covers all phases of a clinical trial.
Step 4: Turn on Your Filter

To turn on a filter, simply click on it. [See arrow.]
If we click on “Clinical Trial,” it filters our results down to 136, a much more handleable number. Be aware that these filters are “sticky filters.” They stay turned on until you turn them off, so be sure to turn them off by clicking on “clear all” [see arrow on right] or “clear” [see arrow on left] if you no longer need the same filter.

Some other useful filters include language, which allows you to limit results to only languages you speak. Sex and ages can also be helpful if you are looking at the drug’s effect on a particular sex or age group. You may also try narrowing by journal category, such as core clinical journals or dental journals.

If you need or would like more assistance, please feel free to contact us as 617-638-4228 or refquest@bu.edu