

"How to Report Statistics in Medicine, Second Edition"

Thomas A. Lang and Michelle Sestic, 2006, 488 pages, American College of Physicians, \$54.95

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"How to Report Statistics in Medicine" is the antidote to Mark Twain's witticism that there are "lies, damned lies, and statistics." If you use statistical findings in your writings, you now have no excuse for misleading or ambiguous presentation of your data. If you encounter statistical findings in your readings, you now have a guide to fend off the authors' statistical sins. The preface points out that a review of the medical literature in 1991 by G.D. Murray found that about 50% of articles include clear statistical errors (that do not require examination of the underlying data to expose).

This book has been selected for
[The First Clinical Research Bookshelf](#)
Essential reading for clinical research professionals

This book is a model of clear exposition. Hundreds of concise recommendations and warnings are organized in 21 chapters, within four sections:

- Guidelines for reporting statistics in medicine
- Guidelines for reporting research designs and activities
- Guidelines for reporting integrated research methods
- Guidelines for reporting data and statistics in tables and figures

To provide a very simple example, most biological data, e.g., describing body temperature or drug metabolism, are not normally distributed, so statistical measures such as mean and standard distribution can be misleading. The book recommends that the titles of tables and charts be self-explanatory without reference to the text of the article, and that column headings use words found in the text. Read the book to find out why.

The book advises presenting risks in context. For example, in 1985, 311 people in New York City were bitten by rats... and 1,519 by other people.

The book includes a 44-page glossary of statistical terms and tests, as well as a description of 40 potential sources of bias, and other useful appendices.

The book is available in bookstores.

Reviewer

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