

Why publish a medical case report?

Mehrdad Jalalian

Editor In-Chief, Electronic Physician, Mashhad, Iran

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Mehrdad Jalalian, Electronic Physician, Mashhad, Iran. Email: mehrdad.medic@gmail.com

Keywords: scientific writing, journal, case report

Additional Information for citing this article:

Title of Journal: Electronic physician; Abbreviated title of journal: Electron. Physician

doi: 10.14661/2014.786-787

Editorial information:

Type of article: Editorial

Published: May.10.2014

© 2014 The Authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a report is an account given of a particular matter, especially in the form of an official document, after thorough investigation or consideration by an appointed person or body (1). In the clinical sciences domain, the case reports usually describe rare or important cases (2). A common question in the minds of young clinicians is whether a case is valuable enough to be reported in the form of a case report article. Based on my years of experience editing case report articles and supervising postgraduate medical students in writing and publishing case reports, I categorize case report articles into four main types: Rare cases, clinically important cases, Cases with impact on health-treatment standard operating procedures, and educational cases.

The first type of case reports consists of reports that address rare cases. Without doubt, such rare cases should be reported, and, indeed, such reports are traditionally the most common type of case report, and they should be, and generally are, welcomed by academic journals. However, the current atmosphere in academia requires extensive lists of citations for articles to be recognized as valuable contributions to existing knowledge and to be deemed worthy of publication. To me, that definitely is a significant and questionable deviation in assessing knowledge, and it forces journal editors to reject rare case reports because they cannot possibly include large numbers of citations of other related work that has been published. To be honest, an article that is published for the sake of being cited has very little value. There are numerous benefits that accrue to science when rare case reports are published, including their potential influence in developing new hypotheses, which can be a vital contribution to the science.

Case reports of new occurrences of diseases in a population that is usually free of that disease can be categorized in this group. The second type of case reports account for clinically important issues. These articles usually present, for example, new side effects of medicines, short- and long-term consequences of diseases and their rare complications, and adverse responses to routine treatment protocols. It is apparent that these case reports can contain extremely important new pieces of knowledge that have the potential for expanding our current knowledge of clinical situations and medical treatment protocols.

The third type of case reports are those with an impact on the current standard operating procedures in clinical science and public health management. This type of case reports conveys practical and valuable information that shows the effectiveness or reliability of a standard procedure, or such reports may warn of the need for changes in routine health surveillance techniques (3). Indeed, they can teach the health policy makers how to manipulate their current routines and standards to achieve higher levels of performance and effectiveness.

Educational or classical cases are the fourth category of case report articles. One may claim that there is no value in publishing the classical cases that have no unique or rare feature; however, the classical cases are vitally important

for their educational value in clinical studies. No matter what types of case reports they receive for potential publication, the academic journals should consider them to be equal in value to cohort studies, with the only difference being that the case reports discuss and monitor individual cases rather than a group.

References

1. Report. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford University Press. Available online at: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/report> (accessed January 03, 2012).
2. Jalalian M, Danial A.H. Writing for academic journals: A general approach. *Electron Physician*. 2012; 4(2): 474-6. doi: 10.14661/2014.474-476
3. Jalalian M, Bazargani R, Shokri S, Latiff L, Syed Hassan S.T, Hosseinpour M. Lessons from an IV Drug abuser: Reform the blood safety surveillance measures. *HealthMed*. 2010; 4(1):84-6