

MAKING A CASE FOR MORE CASE REPORTS

A case report is a form of medical communication. It is arguably the oldest and basic type of scientific publication,¹ dating from 17th century² and has since become a key element of medical literature.³ Several definitions have been used to describe this genre, but a very encompassing definition by Carey states that: "A case report is the publication in the medical scientific literature of a single clinical observation whose principal purpose is to generate hypotheses regarding human disease or provide insight into clinical practice".⁴

Case reports allow for anecdotal sharing of personal clinical experiences,¹ which draw attention to crucial observations, uncommon medical occurrences, the mechanisms underlying such conditions, unanticipated adverse effects or benefits of therapeutic measures and novel skills.⁵ They often contain one main message, stimulate the reader's interest, and highlight the "discovery aspect" of medical knowledge.^{4,6}

Case reports witnessed gradual decline of regard and interest from scientific community of publishers and researchers alike in the second half of the 20th century, with increased emphasis on evidence based medicine.^{4,7} Studies examining the frequency with which some top journals publish this type of genre indicated a downward trend.^{2,4,6,8,9} Observed reasons include: The believe that case reports provide a lower quality of evidence.^{1,8,10}; Publishers' obsession with "Impact Factor" (A factor of how many times published articles are cited) - and studies have shown that case reports get much less citations.^{4,6,8} and lastly some institutions attach little or no academic value to published case reports with regards to promotion for academicians^{5,11-13} causing reduced enthusiasm about writing case reports compared to other types of research works.

Notwithstanding the perceived and actual weaknesses of case reports in terms of generalizability of findings and reproducibility of methods, ability to adduce causality *et cetera*,¹⁴ there are still numerous benefits, importance and uniqueness of case reports which makes them very relevant in scientific literature.

They can help with the discovery and reporting of novel health occurrences which may alert readers to similar cases,^{3,14-16} hypothesis formulation,^{1,4,6,8,14,15} presentation of in-depth narrative studies,¹⁴ study of rare disorders which other study designs like randomized control trials are not ideally suited due to limited number of cases,^{4,8,14} changing and/or improving clinical practice,^{6,17} resolving ethical

constraints that may have disallowed experimental studies,¹⁴ contributing to clinical or medical learning and continuing medical education by presenting day-to-day clinical practice, clinicians' diagnostic reasoning, disease management, and follow-up of cases.^{6,8,14-16} Other reported advantages of writing case reports are: Relatively low cost of research and faster publication time,¹⁴ good opportunity for young researchers to learn and hone their skills for scientific writing,^{1,4,14,15,18} a source of educational entertainment for some readers and a means of satisfaction for the author.^{14,16}

It is interesting to note that following the decline in its acceptance, there is currently a gradual rise in the number of published case reports.^{4,7} Several journals are becoming increasingly vocal on their support for more case reports to be published, believing they are integral to medical literature.^{4,6,8} Some journals are now even solely dedicated to this unique style of scientific communication.⁴

Against this background, it is noteworthy that five interesting case reports/case series are featured in this issue of *Annals of Ibadan Postgraduate Medicine (AIPM)*. Situated in a developing country and hosted in a foremost academic health training institution in the country, a significant part of the journal's readership, notably trainee specialist doctors among others will find this edition valuable. Perhaps, clinicians would now begin to find encouragement to write and submit interesting, novel and unique case reports that could add to the body of knowledge, improve clinical practice, provide a clear message and provoke further larger studies that are considered as evidence-based.

REFERENCES

1. Peh WCG, Ng KH. Writing a case report. Singapore Med J. 2010 Jan;51(1):10–3; quiz 14.
2. Carey JC. Significance of case reports in the advancement of medical scientific knowledge. Am J Med Genet Part A [Internet]. 2006 Oct 1;140A(19):2131–4. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.a.31449>
3. Cabán-Martínez AJ, García-Beltrán WF. Advancing medicine one research note at a time: the educational value in clinical case reports. BMC Res Notes [Internet]. 2012;5(1):293. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-0500-5-293>
4. Carey JC. The Importance of Case Reports in advancing scientific knowledge of rare diseases. In Springer, Dordrecht; 2010. 77–86. Available from: http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-90-481-9485-8_5

5. **Dhulkhed VK**, Kurdi MS, Dhulkhed P V, Ramaswamy AH. Faculty promotions in medical institutions in India: Can we improve the criteria? *Indian J Anaesth* [Internet]. 2016 Nov;60(11):796–800. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27942051>
6. **Mahajan RP**, Hunter JM. Volume 100: Case reports: should they be confined to the dustbin? *Br J Anaesth* [Internet]. 2008 May 1;100(6):744–6. Available from: <https://academic.oup.com/bja/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/bja/aen128>
7. **Nissen T**, Wynn R. The recent history of the clinical case report: a narrative review. *JRSM Short Rep* [Internet]. 2012 Dec 1;3(12):1–5. Available from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1258/shorts.2012.012046>
8. **Carey JC**. A species not extinct: Publication of case reports and scientific knowledge. *Am J Med Genet Part A* [Internet]. 2006 Apr 15;140A(8):801–3. Available from: <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/ajmg.a.31176>
9. **Carey JC**. The Importance of case reports in Advancing Scientific Knowledge of Rare Diseases. In: *American Journal of Medical Genetics Part A* [Internet]. 2006. p. 2131–4. Available from: <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/ajmg.a.31449>
10. **Pwee KH**. What is this thing called EBM? *Singapore Med J*. 2004 Sep;45(9):413–7; quiz 418.
11. **Damman U**. Promotion of faculty members executive and procedure bylaws University of Dammam 1435H-2014G [Internet]. Vol. 38. University of Dammam, 2014; 2014 [cited 2017 Dec 20]. 978-603 Scientific council. PROMOTION OF FA p. Available from: https://www.iau.edu.sa/sites/default/files/content-box/promotion_of_faculty_members_30-12-2014.pdf
12. University of Ibadan A and PC for AS. University of Ibadan regulations and guidelines of Promotions for Academic Staff. 2015 Promotion Exercise [Internet]. 2015th ed. Ibadan; 2015. p. 1–26. Available from: [https://ui.edu.ng/sites/default/files/2014_promotion_guidelines_\(current\)_1.pdf](https://ui.edu.ng/sites/default/files/2014_promotion_guidelines_(current)_1.pdf)
13. **Ajao OG**, Lawoyin TO. Guidelines for assessment of publications for contribution to scholarship: a view point. *West Afr J Med* [Internet]. 2005;24(4):338–341. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16483053>
14. **Nissen T**, Wynn R. The clinical case report: a review of its merits and limitations. *BMC Res Notes* [Internet]. 2014 Apr 23;7:264. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4001358/>
15. **Juyal D**, Thaledi S, Thawani V. Writing patient case reports for publication. *Educ Heal @BULLET* [Internet]. 2013;26(2). Available from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/16a3/10ce5f4e9b793767b0a2adbcc148da82f7d0.pdf>
16. **Vandenbroucke JP**. In defense of case reports and case series. *Ann Intern Med* [Internet]. 2001 Feb 20;134(4):330–334. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11182844>
17. **Fiebai P**. Journal ranking and case reports. *Port Harcourt Med J* [Internet]. 2017 May 1;11(2):53–54. Available from: <http://www.phmj.org/article.asp?issn=0795-3038;year=2017;volume=11;issue=2;spage=53;epage=54;aulast=Fiebai>
18. **McNeill A**, Parkin CKE, Rubab U. Using a case report to teach junior doctors about medical publishing. *Med Teach* [Internet]. 2007 Jan 3;29(5):511–511. Available from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01421590701481375>

O.F. Fagbule
Editor-in-Chief