

A Importância da Publicação de Relatos de Casos

The Importance of Publishing Case Reports

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Case reports represent the oldest form of medical scholarship. They are recognized as fundamental for medicine progression. The main purpose of a case report is to provide information about a clinical scenario and to share it with the general medical and scientific community.¹ This editorial outlines the reason why case reports are valuable and essential as part of medical education.

The relevance of case reports may be underestimated when compared to other publications that are more detailed and supported by evidence, but their contribution to medicine has been remarkable. In fact, sharing such valuable and trustworthy information has led to discoveries and the introduction of therapies for novel diseases. In the history of Medicine, there are several significant findings based on clinical case reports, such as the one that led to Nobel Prize award in the 1956 for the discovery of cardiac catheterization, or the discovery of Kawasaki disease.²

However, the number of case reports published over the years has declined, mainly because their publication has a negative value on the impact factor of the medical journals, as they are poorly cited.³ There is also the idea that case reports are imprecise since they are based on clinical subjectivity. As so, some defend that there is a tendency to publish only positive results and rarely negative. In fact, in the era of medicine based on evidence, clinical cases are in the lower place of the hierarchy.⁴

Fortunately, in the last years, there has reborn the idea that they are essential for medical evolution, and many new journals have been created dedicated exclusively to case reports publication.³

Yet, the quality of case reports published varies and, in fact, until recently, there was no guide for their writing. The advent of standardized guidelines for the creation of this type of reports is recent (2013), as CARE guidelines. They consist of a checklist of 14 items that should be included for a good case report: Title; Keywords; Abstract; Introduction; Patient information; Clinical finding; Timeline; Diagnostic assessment; Therapeutic interventions; Follow-up and outcomes; Discussion; Patient perspective; Informed consent and Additional information.⁵ This standardization allows

uniformization and improvement of the quality of published case reports.

Importantly, how should a clinical case be selected for publication? There are many reasons to write a clinical report. In generic terms, the discovery of new diseases, the presentation of rare diseases, unusual forms of common diseases, the complication(s) of a common treatment, or the effect (beneficial or adverse) of a treatment, are examples of those.

It would be expected that junior physicians received formal training on what constitutes a publishable case report, but this is not the current practice. Physicians are usually introduced to case reports for the first time while on medical school, and they often write their own first case report as residents under the supervision of one of their attending physicians. A case report may, in fact, be the easiest way of beginning a successfully career in scientific writing.

Case reports are valuable resources of new and unusual information that can encourage and serve to conduct future research studies with a higher level of evidence. The medical education community should be aware of the importance of writing and publishing good quality case reports. This editorial expects to inspire medical students, residents and physicians to write and continue writing case reports. ■

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