



Editorial for the Challenging Clinical Cases Section

Why and what to write as “Challenging Clinical Cases” in the evidence based era.

Astute observations can add to our understanding of genesis, natural history, pathophysiology and treatment of diseases. Clinical cases generate new hypotheses, providing the bases for future researches that will lead to evidence-based behavior; they exercise shrewd observation skills and a curious analytical mind to understand unexplained features of a given circumstance.

Publication of case reports provides a rich opportunity for students, residents, and fellows in training who have an interest in pursuing a career in academic medicine.

Especially, case reports are appropriate to describe a new disease entity, alert others to unexpected treatment responses, and inform about an groundbreaking treatment for a rare condition, none of which circumstances is fitting for a full clinical trial.

While evidence-based medicine is utterly concerned with finding the best evidence for clinical judgments (i.e. should we apply a specific treatment or diagnostic test for an individual patient?), a case report invariably is hypothesis generating and brings a clear learning point, occasionally of an otherwise known field, an additional compelling point. “The first snap, the initial glimpse....”, that must undergo the hierarchy of evidence with a randomized trial on top.

In other words case reports are involved in the “invention phase” of the expansion of knowledge in medicine (not in its quantifiable validation); they underscore observations, the first step in the scientific method and a necessary supplement to the ambitions of evidence-based medicine. At the end, virtuous case reports always promote further research. The subsequent hypotheses generated from the report are the tentative explanations for the observation and deserve further investigations.

Nevertheless, under this critical and realistic rational it is not easy to get published on the modality, mainly considering the current vast and rapidly growing literature and the brutal competition for a space in the prominent journals. In this context, to mine good observations and ideas is fundamental and at the end undeniable essential and poignant questions must be answered: “What has been learned? Does the case truly contribute to the literature? Is there a new idea encouraging additional research?”

On the other hand, while conducting a thorough review of the literature in preparation of the report is essential, merging “a case report and a literature review” usually yields a lengthy and poorly performed hybrid. Contemporary literature reviews require evidence-based designs and have precise purpose and style. As a rule, case reports and literature reviews are separate study designs and the last is not able to retrieve or hide poor case reports.



Although it is clear that the observation of a single patient can add to our understanding of etiology, pathogenesis, natural history, treatment of particularly rare diseases, and the training of potential junior investigators; recently, the notion that case reports represent a lower quality of evidence in the design hierarchy of studies, and the increasing application of the impact factor (IF) in medical scientific publications as a metric, have frequently relegated case report to the lowest step of the hierarchy of study design and consequently under scrutiny and disfavor among some in the medical scientific publication community.

In the current evaluation system of academic journals, publication of many case reports may negatively affect the rating of an academic journal, driving many journal editors to discontinue or decrease the number of case reports to improve their journals' ratings (i.e., impact factor).

However, despite the potential effects on impact factor, we have the challenging duty of rescuing the documentation of perspicacious clinical observations aiming to revisit the important value of case reports. Many essential facts have been published initially as case reports. In addition, there may be a room for reports with educational value.

In the mission of taking the best advantage of case reports, carefully consider the information for authors in the <http://www.brazjurol.com.br/>. It is our hope that case reports still have a vital place in medical education and in the practice of medicine as the first line of sustenance in documenting clinical phenomena in the peer-reviewed literature; indisputably not in the measurable validation of previous postulations but ultimately supporting the fundamental move of offering new ideas and endorsing further research.

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