Case report: Significance now and then

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Received September 28, 2014; Revised October 10, 2014; Accepted October 12, 2014; Published Online October 26, 2014

Editorial

The history of medical case reports is inadequate in literature. There are cases that dates back in 16th century published in Europe and China. The leading collection from Europe originated from the Portuguese Jewish physician Amatus Lusitanus, who issued 700 cases in instalments of 100 each from 1551-1556. The first from China were the Stone Mountain Medical Case Histories of Wang Ji written up and published in 1531 by his disciple Chen Hue. There were about 100 case histories gathered over 15 years.

Hippocrates's Epidemics, which contain some 300 case histories, had not been considered by many scientists as case reports. They argue that the ones certainly by Hippocrates do not include anything on treatment, but only on the natural history of disease. Then even the books that do comprise knowledge on treatment are thin case reports, "like an embryo". One Chinese definition of case reports is "written traces left by the physician in the search of knowledge."

Case reports are thus hypothetically amusing region for the medical humanities, but the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, rather dulled excitement by advocating that a case report turns patients into entities and is eventually a form of despotism. Case reports, according to Gianna Pomata from Johns Hopkins University, are one of the fundamental forms of chronicle, with other forms including parables, tales, fables, pranks, techniques, and fairy stories. (a form of knowledge that allows doctors to distribute wisdom and spread experience).

According to Richard Smith, the importance of a journal of cases is "to reinvigorate medicine and provide a useful information tool for clinicians and patients."1. The case presents useful information to other clinicians, such as2:

A. Presents a unique disease or syndrome
B. The case(s) illustrates an unexpected (unreported) causal relationship between two or more clinical conditions, e.g., (subluxation(s) and asthma)
C. The case(s) illustrates an unexpected (unreported) favorable or adverse effect of treatment. e.g., (adjusting a subluxation(s) and the favorable effect on a coexisting asthma)

Additionally, there are various benefits an individual practicing clinician derives from case reporting:

- Case reports are not difficult to write (usually 700-900 words)
- Case reports require minimal literature search
- Writing a case report is an easy way to be introduced to clinical research
- Publishing a case report will make you a more credible expert witness
- Publishing a case report will make you better able to critically evaluate other papers
- Case reports represent the first phase of clinical research. They provide the basis, stimulus, and direction for further research
- Case reports published in refereed, indexed scientific journals is a way to advance the profession and contribute to the pool of scientific knowledge
- Case reports may help to establish new protocol and standards of care

References