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ABSTRACTS

Albrecht J, Meves A, Bigby M. Case reports and case series from Lancet had significant impact on medical literature. J Clin Epidemiol 2005; 58(12):1227-1232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2005.04.003

Background and objectives: Case reports and case series are often the first evidence of innovative treatment, but clinical trials need to follow to substantiate this evidence. The objective of this article was to evaluate case reports or case series describing innovative treatment concerning their impact.

Methods: Case reports and case series (n< or =10) from a high-impact journal, The Lancet, published from 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1997, were evaluated according to predefined criteria. To assess publication impact, PubMed, Science Citation Index, the Register of Current Controlled Clinical Trials, and the Cochrane Controlled Clinical Trials Register were searched.

Results: Sixty-four case reports and 39 case series were identified. They were cited on average 17 times (median 6.5; range 0-336). Twenty-four follow-up trials were identified, nine in the register of current controlled clinical trials.

Conclusion: Case reports and case series can be well received, and have significant influence on subsequent literature and possibly on clinical practice. Many were followed by clinical trials. Often, though, they report rare conditions for which trials may not be feasible, and more or less explicitly transfer established treatment into other conditions. Overall, there is a strong publication bias favoring positive results, and opportunity should be created for publication of follow-up reports.

Nissen T, Wynn R. The clinical case report: a review of its merits and limitations. BMC Res Notes 2014; 7:264. https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-0500-7-264

Background: The clinical case report has a long-standing tradition in the medical literature. While its scientific significance has become smaller as more advanced research methods have gained ground, case reports are still presented in many medical journals. Some scholars point to its limited value for medical progress, while others assert that the genre is undervalued. We aimed to present the various points of view regarding the merits and limitations of the case report genre. We searched Google Scholar, PubMed and select textbooks on epidemiology and medical research for articles and book-chapters discussing the merits and limitations of clinical case reports and case series.

Results: The major merits of case reporting were these: Detecting novelties, generating hypotheses, pharmacovigilance, high applicability when other research designs are not possible to carry out, allowing emphasis on the narrative aspect (in-depth understanding), and educational value. The major limitations were: Lack of ability to generalize, no possibility to establish cause-effect relationship, danger of over-interpretation, publication bias, retrospective design, and distraction of reader when focusing on the unusual.

Conclusions: Despite having lost its central role in medical literature in the 20th century, the genre still appears popular. It is a valuable part of the various research methods, especially since it complements other approaches. Furthermore, it also contributes in areas of medicine that are not specifically research-related, e.g. as an educational tool. Revision of the case report genre has been attempted in order to integrate the biomedical model with the narrative approach, but without significant success. The future prospects of the case report could possibly be in new applications of the genre, i.e. exclusive case report databases available online, and open access for clinicians and researchers.