

## Case Report Writing for Absolute Beginners

Dr. Ambika Rajendran Minu MBBS<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nidhi Shankar Kikkeri MBBS<sup>2</sup>,

Dr. Valayamkandathil Mohan Shibilla MBBS

Clinical Extern, Saint John Patrick Medical Clinic, Long Beach, CA, USA<sup>1</sup>

Clinical Observer, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA<sup>2</sup>

Corresponding Author: Dr. Ambika Rajendran Minu MBBS

---

**Abstract:** Case report is one of the common methods of publication in Medical Science. A case report is a description of important scientific observations that are missed or undetectable in clinical trials<sup>1</sup>. A case report is helpful to describe a new or uncommon disease and its manifestations to the medical world. It also helps in introducing a new side effect of a drug that has not been encountered previously. It can also be used to write about an unusual manifestation of a known disease. Case report is considered one of the lowest level of medical publication. But it provides valuable information to the physicians and public health experts.

**Key words:** Case report, Publication, Novice, Absolute Beginner, Medicine, Research,

---

Date of Submission: 28-07-2018

Date Of Acceptance: 12-08-2018

---

### I. Introduction

Case report is the starting point of getting papers published in journals for many physicians and medical students. Even though it sounds easy to write a case report it is very daunting for people who do not have prior experience in medical writing. Published patient case reports provide essential sources of information for the optimal care of patients because case reports can describe important scientific observations that are missed or are undetectable in clinical trials, provide insightful information that widens our knowledge and leads to safer and efficient patient care.<sup>2</sup> For example Acquired Immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and Parkinson's disease were first described as case reports. HIV was first described in the case report titled "A preliminary communication on extensively disseminated Kaposi's sarcoma in a young homosexual man"<sup>3</sup> and Parkinson's disease was first mentioned in the case report titled "An essay on the shaking palsy."<sup>4</sup>

### II. Objective

The objective of this article is to introduce the novice author to the steps and methods involved in writing a case report and getting it published. For an absolute beginner the most important task in publishing a case report is to know where to begin. This article discusses in detail about how to start the process.

### III. Discussion

The first step in writing a case report is to determine the case. Look for an uncommon and unique case during rotations. As mentioned earlier case reports can be about a new disease, unusual presentation of a common disease and peculiar side effects of a drug. Once the case is identified the most important next step is to get the consent of the patient. Patient or the legal guardian in case of a minor or incapacitated patient is explained in detail about the purpose of publishing a case report and an informed written consent should be obtained. If multiple physicians are involved in the care of the patient it is a good idea to get their approval. In certain situations, a clearance certificate from the concerned hospital's Institutional Review Board (IRB) is also mandated. Next step is the most time-consuming part in preparing a case report which is the literature review. It is of utmost importance to do a thorough review of the existing literature to make sure that the findings were not published before, and the case is unique. PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar etc. can be used to do the literature review and to find similar case reports. Previously published similar case reports will help in the understanding of the subject and helps in formulating the specific message to be conveyed.<sup>5</sup>

On completion of the above-mentioned steps the actual process of writing begins. The first step is to find a meaningful and memorable title. Next is writing the author information and author's designation and affiliation.

A case report typically has an Abstract, Introduction, Case Presentation, Discussion, Conclusion and References. The format of case reports can vary depending on the journals. Tables, figures, graphs, images and illustrations are supplementary parts and will enhance the case report's flow and clarity.<sup>1</sup> Abstract is a short summary of the entire case and is usually around 100-200 words. Introduction gives a brief peek into what the

case report has to offer. It describes the case in a few sentences. Introduction describes the purpose of the article and the background information to show how the case adds to the medical literature.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Case presentation is the heart of the whole paper. It details the case and stresses on the uniqueness of the case. Case presentation involves the patient demographics, presenting complaints, past history, family history, physical examination, relevant lab tests and imaging, treatment plan, patient's response to the treatment, any complications and follow-up. Relevant positive and negative findings should be included.<sup>1</sup> Discussion is the most important part of the article as it describes why the case needs to be published. It should include the relevant literature pertinent to the current case, which was obtained during the literature review and should stress why the case is publication worthy.<sup>9</sup> Discussion should project out the uniqueness of the case and how it is different from the previously published similar cases. Conclusion is the closure of the case report. The authors can give their suggestions and inferences in this section. It briefly describes the essence of the case report. The final section of a case report is the References. It ensures that proper credit is given to the articles from where citation was made throughout the article. It also highlights the extensive literature review undertaken to prove the distinctiveness of the case report.

After writing the case report, the next step is to find out a journal to get it published. A PubMed indexed journal with high impact factor will be the best option. But many reputed journals shy away from accepting case reports as it is considered the weakest among all articles. Publication charges are also quite high in most of the well-known journals. A thorough research should be undertaken to find out the best journal to submit the article.

#### IV. Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to guide the new authors and students in writing an effective case report. The important steps in writing a case report involve selecting the appropriate case, getting an informed written consent from the patient, getting approval from the consultants involved in the care of the patient and getting clearance from the IRB. For a medical student, the attending should be able to serve as the mentor and guide through the entire process.

#### References

- [1]. Sun, Zhonghua. "Tips for Writing a Case Report for the Novice Author." *Journal of Medical Radiation Sciences* 60.3 (2013): 108–113. PMC. Web. 29 July 2018. PMID: 26229618
- [2]. Henry Cohen. *American Journal of HealthSystemPharmacy* October 2006, 63 (19) 1881892; DOI <https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp060182>
- [3]. Gottleib GJ, Rogoz A, Vogel JV, Friedman-Kien A, Rywlin AM, Weiner EA, Ackerman AB. A preliminary communication on extensively disseminated Kaposi's sarcoma in a young homosexual man. *Am J Dermatopathol.* 1981;7:111–114. doi: 10.1097/0000372-198100320-00002. PMID: 7270808
- [4]. Goetz CG. The history of Parkinson's disease: early clinical descriptions and neurological therapies. *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine.* 2011;7(1):a008862. DOI:10.1101/cshperspect.a008862. PMID:22229124
- [5]. Dr Varo Kirthi, MA (Cantab) BM BCh. RCP insight How to write a clinical case report. RCP/0011/23/09/2011
- [6]. DeBakey L, DeBakey S. The case report. I. Guidelines for preparation. *Int J Cardiol* 1983;4(3):357-64
- [7]. Squires BP. Case reports: what editors want from authors and peer reviewers. *CMAJ* 1989;141(5):379- 380.
- [8]. Bart N. Green, MEd, DC, DACBSP and Claire D. Johnson, MEd, DC, DACBSP. Writing Patient Case Reports for Peer-reviewed Journals: Secrets of the Trade. *Journal of Sports Chiropractic & Rehabilitation.* Volume 14 • Number 3 • 2000
- [9]. McCarthy LH, Reilly KE. How to Write a Case Report. *Fam Med* 2000;32(3):190-1

Dr. Ambika Rajendran Minu MBBS "Case report writing for absolute beginners." *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences (IOSR-JDMS)*, vol. 17, no. 8, 2018, pp 01-02