

EDITORIAL

A new argument in defense of case reports: patient empowerment.

Fernández-Valencia JA.

Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology. Hospital Clinic. University of Barcelona. Spain.

Abstract

Case reports and case series are commonly considered in a second-class status in the medical literature but maintain many potential roles to be beneficial such as recognition and description of new diseases or detection of adverse or beneficial drug side effects.

While the discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of maintaining case reports in the medical literature has been focused regarding physicians of its value for knowledge or medical education, in a patient-centered care model we should be aware of the possible interaction of patients and their relatives with online case reports, specially for those that show its contents for free.

In this editorial, an example is discussed regarding the recently published book “Battle Scars”, by Dinaaz Lentin, in which she describes how she found the solution to an uncommon condition, by performing a search in Google that drove her to a case report published in the International Journal of Advanced Joint Reconstruction.

For uncommon conditions, and unresolved pathologies, open case reports could be of extreme value for patients and relatives seeking for answer, in order to team with the physician in the search of a solution for their condition.

Keywords

Case Report, Patient-Centered Care, Google, Patient Empowerment.



Case reports and case series are commonly considered a second-class publication in the medical literature; journals are penalized for their publication, and authors are discouraged to report them, unless the reported finding is really unique and relevant. As a consequence, case reports are less and less interesting for researchers and institutions, and poorly rated in the academic curricula.

As stated in a classical paper by Vandenbroucke (1), case reports and case series maintain many potential roles to be beneficial such as recognition and description of new diseases, detection of adverse or beneficial drug side effects (pharmacovigilance), study of mechanisms of disease, medical education and audit, and recognition of rare manifestations of disease. Nissen and Wynn also discuss the value of case reports in a recent review, and they find that the

major limitations are the lack of ability to generalize, no possibly to establish cause-effect relationship, danger of over-interpretation, publication-bias, retrospective design, and distraction of the reader then focusing on the unusual (2).

However, patients are more active in seeking information about their diseases, and Google is a powerful and commonly used tool (3). What if the patient is looking for an answer, for a clue for the cure? An answer that possibly his or her physician did not provide? What if these answers or clues could be found in case reports? Specially in open case reports?

This is the case of Dinaaz Lentin. In her book *Battle Scars* (4), she describes her different challenges regarding her health, in a book that she describes as her self-discovery as

she “travelled through a medical maze”. In chapter 14, she explains that she had a severe thumb weakness after a kidney stone surgery, and that there was no improvement or a treatment by her treating physicians. But she came across one case report published by Weinrauch et al in our Journal, describing the same condition but after a surgery of the hip (5). This led her to the solution of her problem, despite she had to visit several doctors to finally undergo a surgery that would recover the normal function of her left hand.

Patients are no longer regarded as passive objects, but rather as active subjects who work as partners with health care professionals to optimize health (6). Despite the information available in the internet could be misleading (7) the study of articles in peer reviewed journals could be valuable for the patient-physician discussion, specially for rare or unresolved conditions, in a patient-centered care model. This possibility is empowering patients providing greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health. The case presented is a clear example of a favorable empowering through an open case report.

We celebrate that this journal provided Dinaaz with a clue to improve her life, and we want to thank to every author contributing to this Journal in any scientific approach; it could be a review, an original or why not, a case report. Since, as shown, a case report could improve another patient’s life. And this is the pure essence of our scientific publications. To improve patient’s quality of life.

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