

How much Literature Review is enough for a Case Report?

Literature review is an essential part of any scientific document. It's the foundation on which the premise of scientific research is built. Every scientific study has to be seen in context of the existing knowledge and literature. However literature is growing at exponential rate today and especially with so many online journals today it's really difficult to review all literature. This poses unique challenge to authors who wish to submit a case report for Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports.

First issue is how much important is literature review for a case report. From early days of case reports, literature review is been the most important cornerstone of a case report. Especially since earlier only rare cases were considered as case reports [1]. So to establish the rarity of the case it was important to thoroughly review the literature. For us at Journal of Orthopaedic Case Report, literature review is one of the most significant part of the case report. Most of the times it is the section which decides on acceptance or rejection of borderline cases. For cases that are rare we recommend our authors to do a thorough review of literature and also prepare a table of literature review which should be added to the manuscript. For cases where the focus is on a specific clinical learning point, the literature review needs to be more exhaustive. When a clinical point has to be made, the literature review should cover all the alternative plans that are already described in literature or at least similar cases that have used a different plan. Many cases that are published in Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports are more on clinical strategies that are improvised and applied to clinical cases. In these scenario we wish our authors to provide rationale for their choices with back up from literature. Also a thorough review of all exiting strategies should be added to the review. The intention is to make the reader aware of all existing management options and then understand why particular option was chosen in the particular patient. This will also help effective communication between the authors and reviewers and ultimately the readers.

The second issue is how much literature to review. With so much literature available at times literature review may miss important article which is relevant to the case. At times it happens that too much literature is added to the article making it bulky and in need for repeated editing. To resolve these issues we would recommend authors to do a thorough PubMed and google Scholar review which will include most important of the articles. If the number of articles relevant to your search are exceeding thirty you may apply filters like selecting articles published in last 5 years or selecting articles only from PubMed. Selecting article only on PubMed will help get the most relevant articles in your review but an additional scrutiny of google result will help you not miss out on important articles. Google will most of the times provide a very comprehensive list of articles and it may need some effort on part of authors to find the relevant articles. But combining both search strategies will definitely make the review more complete and relevant. The number of references should be limited to maximum of 30 for journal of orthopaedic case reports. This will again require authors to review select the most relevant articles from the literature search. Try and include the most recent articles and also from the most relevant authors and medical centres. In case a particular authors has written multiple articles on similar topic, one of his most relevant can be included while others can be left. Articles that are most close to your clinical scenario should be preferred over other articles. Also articles that have chosen strategies similar to yours should be preferred. If the number of articles is still much more, try to limit the references in terms of geography and include articles that are relevant in your country or geographical location to make is more comparable. Also patient profiles can be matched in terms of age and gender to provide for a better comparison between your case and the case from literature. As far as possible provide a literature

Access this article online

Website:
www.jocr.co.in

DOI:
2250-0685.470

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review table with list of articles, authors names, number of patients, interventions, results and complications to provide a complete perspective to reader. Review of complications needs a special mention and it should be a part of every surgical case that is reported.

In the end try and weave a continuous narrative including parts from your case and reference to context from literature and make an interesting story for readers and editors. We all love a good story which is told in a well woven text and has relevant learning points underlined.

Dr. Ashok Shyam

Editor- Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports

References

1. Shyam AK. Only Rare Cases are Case Reports: Busting a Myth. Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports 2014;Jan-Mar;4(1):1-2

Conflict of Interest: Nil
Source of Support: None

How to Cite this Article

Shyam A. How much Literature Review is enough for a Case Report? Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports 2016 July - Aug;6(3): 1-2.