

The Value of Case Reports.



Case reports are a means of bringing attention to disorders which are rare or not previously described and to discuss methods of management which are new. The major journals are inundated with case reports. Few are published because of the constraints on space or because they do not bring information of sufficient interest. However, in a general journal, the editors are always happy to publish some case reports since they may provide variety and interest, giving a degree of lightness to an otherwise turgid publication.

What is the editor looking for in a case report? It must be an eye catching piece. Has the condition or circumstance been described before? If a fresh or modified method of management is discussed is this instructive? Are the radiographs or illustrations of the minimum number and quality to enhance the text? The references must be apposite and carefully chosen. A 'review of the literature' is not required and, if submitted, will be seen as irrelevant and carried out simply to impress the editor with the overall knowledge of the author.

Do case reports have any relevance in the current climate of 'evidence based' assessment? Are they of only short term impact, merely providing passing entertainment? I do not think so. They encourage an appreciation of the rarity, show a keenness of observation and awareness, stimulate the desire to value the uncommon, look behind the obvious and pass on the information gained to a wider audience. The 'evidence' lies in the observations of the author and should be judged accordingly.

A case report is often the first venture into writing for a journal which has been undertaken by the author. Preparing the article will be a worrying and perhaps trying experience, but it will serve as an introduction to the skills and disciplines of medical writing, which will serve the author well in the future. The editor of the journal to which the article is submitted must realise this and understand that, although the paper may not be accepted, his further role is to help the author improve his work and advise him as to how he might progress. A similar role should be undertaken by reviewers. Their role is not to simply accept or reject the article, but to give clear reasons for their decision and advice on possible improvement.

Several years ago, on one of my periodic visits to India, the now editor of the JOCR discussed his plans for the publication with me. I was uncertain as to whether it would be successful but clearly I was too pessimistic. The journal now has a healthy circulation and no shortage of material. I am delighted that it is so well established and wish the JOCR a long and successful life. The continual expansion and increasing scope of orthopaedic surgery in India will inevitably lead to more material for publication and the Indian Orthopaedic Research Group are well equipped to take part in this.

Regards...

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