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Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

How to Write a Clinical Case Report

A clinical case report details a novel or noteworthy patient case describing their medical problem and how it was managed (in some cases, it might cover a few patients or a single family). A good case report presents this information as a clear and compelling story and answers the same fundamental questions as any good piece of journalism: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? (American Medical Writers Association [guidelines](#)). Steps in preparing a case report are the following:

- 1. Perform a literature search:** Confirm your case is of high interest by searching for your topic of interest and include the phrase "case report" in the search terms. Note that this differs from a "case study" (a research methodology) so do not use these terms interchangeably in your search. Also, each journal will have its own criteria for what is worthy of publication.
- 2. Choose a target journal:** If you do not know which journal would be suitable, a good first step is to consult your colleagues. There are also [published](#) and [online](#) lists of journals that accept case reports. Some journals accept audiovisual multi-media as a component.
- 3. Check the guidelines for case reports:** Not all journals are the same. One difference is that some require an abstract and others stipulate no abstract. Another is that some journals not only provide guidelines, but additionally recommend or require adherence to the [CARE guidelines](#), which were created by a panel of experts to promote the accuracy, transparency, and utility of case reports. If a journal gives only minimal instructions, consult the CARE guidelines for details as to how to write the report.
- 4. Write the report:** Case reports contain a common set of core elements, all of which are included in the CARE guidelines. Therefore, a good strategy is to write the first draft following the [CARE checklist](#) and then modify or delete specific items to comply with the journal's specific instructions.

The order or phrasing of core elements in a case report may vary slightly among journals. The CARE checklist delineates specific recommendations for each component, as paraphrased below:

Title. State the main diagnosis or intervention and include the phrase, "case report".

Key Words. Choose words relating to the diagnosis or treatment; include "case report" as a key word.

Abstract. Summarize the following (without references):

- The novelty of the case and how it adds to scientific or clinical knowledge
- The patient's presentation and key clinical findings
- The main diagnosis, treatments, or interventions
- The outcome
- The key conclusion (the "take-home" message)

Introduction. Explain in one to two paragraphs why this case is unique or noteworthy, and place it in the context of the existing medical and scientific literature.

Narrative. Include the following:

- Description of patient's presentation, concerns and relevant medical and demographic history
- Description of significant physical examination and clinical findings
- Diagnostic assessment: diagnostic methods and diagnosis (including alternative diagnoses that were considered)
- Interventions, outcomes (including unexpected or adverse outcomes), and follow-up diagnostic or other test results
- High-quality tables and figures, as needed and as allowed
- A timeline of the clinical visits and key events

In writing the narrative section, also keep the following points in mind:

1. If complications arose from a procedure, how appropriate, guideline-directed clinical practices were followed must be described (see also [Grapsa, J., JACC: Case Reports](#)).
2. All patient data must be de-identified, and the case report must be HIPAA-compliant.
3. All essential details of the patient's presentation and treatment must be provided.
4. Any use of "human-interest" details should be judicious; avoid distractions, drama, and inappropriate tone.
5. If other possible diagnoses were excluded, the reasons must be included.

Discussion and Conclusion: The Discussion is crucial and must explain clearly why your case is of interest to clinicians or researchers. Summarize how the case was managed, including:

Upcoming Opportunities

Have a question about writing grants or research articles? [Contact us](#) and we will attempt to answer it in a future newsletter.

Seeding Excellence: DEI Team Awards

Applications are sought for collaborative, one-year OVPR diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) team awards. Awards are up to \$25k to support interdisciplinary teams consisting of multiple investigators working with a collection of undergraduates with a preference for students from traditionally marginalized groups. The goals are to engage these students in mentored research and training experiences that prepare them to excel as next generation researchers and scholars. Applications are due [April 3, 2023](#). [See the RFP and how to apply here.](#)

NIH Request for Information on Re-envisioning NIH-supported Postdoctoral Training

Recent data from NSF suggest that postdoc numbers are declining. NIH would like to hear the perspectives of postdocs and those who interact with them on the following: roles and responsibilities of the academic postdoc; fundamental challenges to recruitment and retention; potential improvements to existing NIH policies, programs, or resources; and external resources or approaches that could inform NIH efforts to improve the postdoctoral training ecosystem.

[More information](#)

Respond by [April 14, 2023](#).

NSF CAREER Recent Awardee Panel Session

The Research Development Office is presenting a NSF CAREER Current Awardee Panel Discussion/Q&A session on Friday, [April 14, 2023](#) from noon to 1 pm. This panel session will provide an opportunity to hear from three accomplished NSF CAREER award recipients regarding their experience with the application process, need-to-know information, plus much more.

[More information.](#)

[Register here](#) to receive the Zoom link and submit questions ahead of time.

Hardin Open Workshop: Data Sharing and Publication

[Apr 17, from 1 to 2 pm](#) (Zoom)

You've received funding for a project, and your research funder expects you to share the data. Or perhaps you are working on an article, and the journal requires you to share your data. In this workshop, we'll walk through the process of preparing data for sharing or publication, important decisions to make, and ways to enable your data to have a broader impact.

[Registration](#)

Maximizing Pivot to Find Funding and Collaborators

Do you want to maximize your time spent searching for funding opportunities or potential project collaborators? Join us on an upcoming date below to learn how Pivot can save you time and effort in identifying the right funding opportunities for your

- Strengths and limitations of the approach used, with reference to the literature
- The reasons behind the medical inferences and conclusions, supported by reference to the literature
- A summary of the main conclusions and take-home “lessons”

Patient Perspective: In 1 or 2 paragraphs, provide the patient (or parent) perspective on the illness and its treatment.

Acknowledgements and References:

- Thank the patient (but not by name) in the Acknowledgements section.
- Follow the journal guidelines for the Acknowledgements and Reference sections.

Ethics Statement: This states that informed consent and any other ethical approvals were obtained.

- Provide documentation of informed consent if requested. Note that some journals have their own consent forms.
- List any other relevant approvals, e.g., IRB approval number. (A case report needs an IRB only if the reported activities constitute human subjects research.)

Happy writing!

Mike Rebagliati and the SERCC editing team

research lines as well as identifying collaborators with the relevant expertise.

April 27 from 2 to 3 pm. [Register here.](#)

May 22 from 11 am to 12 pm. [Register here.](#)

NIH Center for Scientific Review (CSR): Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program

This program aims to help early career scientists (e.g., Assistant Professor or equivalent) become more competitive as grant applicants through first-hand experience with peer review and to enrich and diversify CSR's pool of trained reviewers. Eligibility criteria apply.

[More information](#)

Grant Writing Webinar Series: Writing a Competitive Application

Sponsored by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)

This webinar recording discusses how to acquire and structure the feedback needed to develop a strong application, effective practices for grant writing and revising, and the NIH funding decision process.

[View recording](#)

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