



# How to write a case report

Prof Judy Savige

The University of Melbourne

Department of Medicine (MH and NH)



# How to write a case report quickly, efficiently and get it published

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# Case reports are valuable

- Case reports are experiments of nature, valuable if they teach us something
- Contribute to our medical knowledge
- May be novel or contain a 'teaching point'
- 'Never drop off your CV', help throughout career
- How we learn to write and publish
- A thrill for us to explain and describe something for first time

# What we should publish

- Manuscripts with at least one novel observation or interpretation
  - New clinical feature, association for a syndrome
  - New temporal sequence that suggests a cause
  - Medication – new, important side-effect, interaction or response
- A teaching point ‘Common cases that present a diagnostic, ethical or management challenge, or indicate a mechanism of injury, pharmacology or pathology’

# Novel observation

- Lupus anticoagulant and thrombosis in ANCA-associated vasculitis
- A 70 year old man with GPA and C-ANCA, who was treated and 2 years later developed a venous thrombosis and lupus anticoagulant when C-ANCA was undetectable
- Novel points
  - Association of ANCA with lupus anticoagulant (anticardiolipin antibodies were already reported)
  - Antibody and thrombosis developed years after vasculitis presentation, inactive vasculitis

# Novel observation

- ANCA and vasculitis developed after staph wound infection
- Patient in hospital with AMI, CABGs, developed sternal wound infection; urine microscopy and renal function became very abnormal, ANCA became detectable over 6 weeks
- Novel point
  - Temporal sequence suggested a role of staph infection in the development of ANCA (nasal staph already implicated in ANCA vasculitis)

# Novel observation – case series

- AntiGBM disease with normal renal function

# Is this worth writing up?

- Present patient at a unit meeting or Grand Round – find out if observation is novel or a suitable teaching point before doing all the work for a manuscript
- Undertake a literature survey
- Talk to your local experts
- There will often be subtle differences from previous reports – but reconsider if lots of similar patients
- Does not have to be a giant step for humankind!

# Where should you publish?

- Be strategic
- Aim for an international journal
- Difficult to publish in some Australian journals
- **BMJ case reports** – online, publishes quickly and free to access. You have to pay to publish but many hospital libraries have a subscription for publishing
- High acceptable rate – 2/3 submissions (better than most)
- <http://casereports.bmj.com>
- BMJ case reports are especially interested in teaching points

# Format of manuscript

- Similar for all journals
- **Signed Consent form from the patient**
- Title page – title, authors, contact details, short title, corresponding author
- Abstract – keywords
- Introduction
- Case study
- Discussion
- **Acknowledgements**
- **Conflicts of interest**
- List of Tables and Figures
- **References – Endnote**
- Tables and Figures

# A model for your paper

- Ask for help from a consultant who has seen the patient and writes a lot with registrars
- Choose the journal you will submit to
- Find similar manuscripts in this journal and use them as models
- Get all your results together
- Complete your literature search
- Work out your 'angle'

# Writing up

- Get your radiology and histology figures if appropriate
- Write the case report as if you are presenting it to a unit meeting
- Write Introduction and Discussion together (bits are interchangeable)
- Write Abstract last since you know by then what you want to say

# Discussion

- Useful to use headings in your draft to tell story
- Discussion
  - Start 1st paragraph with most important conclusions
  - Dissect out the message
  - Compare results with previous reports
  - Deal with any problems eg missing results
  - What are the implications
  - What is the teaching point?

# Extra bits

- Visual summary
- Three to five summary points
  
- Cover letter to the Editor
- why your manuscript is important
- that all authors approve this version
- that they have no financial or other Conflicts of Interest

# Some tips

- Highlight the novelty or teaching value
- Be as concise and clear as possible
- Use as few abbreviations as possible
- References – reference the first time a phenomenon was described not the last time you found it or review
- Keep Tables to a minimum
- Do not repeat text in body of manuscript and in Table

# Don'ts

- Don't say "this is the first time this has been demonstrated"
- Don't say "this is the first time in Australia"
- Don't give an historical perspective
- Don't use previous authors' names in sentences. "Dr Green demonstrated fewer leaves in Winter; Dr Brown showed more leaves in Spring" This detracts from the impact. Summarise the relevant points from previous publications.
- Don't reference something we all know "Humans have two kidneys"
- Don't refer to 'case' rather "a patient/person/individual with a disease"

# Clear writing

- Be clear. Aim to have the reader understand and remember what you have written
- We describe a disease in a certain sequence. Prevalence, cause, clinical features, treatment...
- Use as few words as possible
- Writing is very formal. Some words are never used
- Use Australian/British spelling – the journal will change it if necessary
- Use the past tense to describe what happened

# Authorship

- The person who does most work is first author
- The senior consultant who helped you most is last author
- Include other people whose contributions were critical – other consultants, radiology (if they provided Xrays etc)

# Writing takes a long time

- Writing takes MUCH longer than you expect
- Write, rewrite and rewrite
- Leave your final draft for a week and go back to it for final changes
- The better your final version, the less work for your consultant, and the sooner manuscripts will be submitted

# Unusual clinical photograph

- Radiology, histology or retinal photograph or all three
- Less work than a case study, can be published in high ranking journal
- Will need to be highly novel or have a teaching point

# Submission

- Author instructions are subtly different for each journal
- Reference format differs for each journal
- Almost always online submission
- All authors must agree to this version

# Making sure paper gets written

- You need to be in charge. One person does nearly all the work and not everyone can write
- Make a deadline for changes to the final draft from the other authors with the understanding that if they don't get back to you, they consent to submission

# Rejection

- Often the decision sounds like a rejection but is actually saying that the journal will accept the manuscript if you make the requested changes
- If your manuscript is not accepted, you can argue with the editors! Many do
- Consider the reviewers' comments, change your manuscript, send to another or more specialised journal
- Maybe resubmit as a letter. A letter is less work, and better than no publication at all! However the acceptance rate may be low