

The Case for Case Reports

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In The Case Report Issue, we feature four separate case reports presenting different conditions, much like patients may present in succession to a busy ED. Though considered of lesser importance than other types of peer-reviewed literature in this era of evidence-based medicine, case reports nevertheless fulfill an important role in clinical practice, medical education, and even medical research by identifying and tracking an important cause of a developing disease—especially one with a toxicologic or infectious etiology. In some instances, case reports also identify effective or ineffective treatments (though the latter is more rarely reported) and adverse effects of approved treatments, especially those of a newly introduced “Phase IV” medication.

Often, the ED is the initial setting for many reportable occurrences, and in recent years, patients first presenting to EDs have alerted the entire medical community to serious emerging illnesses such as Legionnaires’ disease, HIV and AIDS, anthrax, and Ebola. Most recently, firsthand reports by a pair of mother/daughter physicians in Brazil linked an alarming appearance of several new cases of microcephaly to a rash that followed a mosquito bite during pregnancy, and ultimately to identification of the mosquito-borne Zika virus.

Similarly, toxicologists at urban poison centers have been able to rapidly link cases of new and puzzling adverse effects and deaths reported by area emergency physicians to a dangerous new street drug or combination of drugs in that area, such as synthetic cannabinoid agonists, or heroin mixed with scopolamine, and then immediately alert other physicians and the public to these dangers.

As recently described by Florek and Dellavalle in *Journal of Medical Case Reports* (<http://bit.ly/28PLi7w>), case reports make meaningful contributions to the knowledge and education of medical students, residents, fellows, and (we would add) attendings. Written with the goal of sharing information for medical or scientific purposes, they often serve as a young physician’s first experience with medical writing and provide a solid foundation for manuscript preparation and publication.

Finally, a good ED case report that includes accurate descriptions of all relevant features along with any unique departures from classical presentations, followed by an up-to-date review of current treatments, presents most of us with a vivid means of identifying and remembering the salient features of a clinical problem or disease.

DOI: 10.12788/emed.2016.0044