

Case reports and anecdotal evidence



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Published case reports have a long and rich tradition in medicine. The *Blue Journal* stopped publishing case reports and the American Academy of Dermatology launched our sister journal *JAAD Case Reports*. This is the age of evidence-based medicine: Do case reports still matter? The simple answer is: *Yes they do*.

American medical schools have embraced case-based learning because of data showing superior knowledge retention when information is provided in the context of clinical patients, and case-based learning platforms have spawned future leaders of the Choosing Wisely campaign.¹⁻³ If you aren't reading *JAAD Case Reports* regularly, you are missing out on important information and learning opportunities that may help your patients.

Case reports remain important to identify new conditions, create potent images to help us remember important diagnostic possibilities, identify adverse reactions to new medications, and suggest important disease associations and mechanistic approaches to therapy.^{4,5} Semmelweis' observation of the death of a friend from a hand infection after examining a patient with obstetric sepsis contributed to his hypothesis of hand hygiene and puerperal fever. The observation that Rachel Cowden, who died of breast cancer, had a bumpy face has saved many lives of patients with the syndrome that bears her name. The observation of hair regrowth in a patient taking oral minoxidil led to an entire field of modern science, and the observation of a small cluster of young men with a rare sarcoma drew attention to the newly emerging AIDS epidemic.

Case reports matter, but anecdotal evidence must be judged carefully. Anecdotal evidence can be

misleading because the most recent or vivid example may not be the most typical. The power of anecdotal evidence is easy to understand if you have ever contributed to a medication-related death. It may not be a common occurrence, but it just takes one to put you off the drug.

Although anecdotal evidence can introduce recall and cognitive bias into medical decision making, it also provides pivotal observations that give rise to further scientific study and controlled trials. The need for case reports has not changed. Peer review of case reports selects for those of most value to the practicing physician and researchers, and *JAAD Case Reports* strives to bring you the best and most important case reports relevant to our specialty. They are early indicators of sentinel medical events and serve as memorable case-based learning tutorials. We encourage you not only to read *JAAD Case Reports* regularly but also to contribute your best cases.

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