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EUROPEAN
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HOW TO WRITE A GOOD CLINICAL CASE

Structure of a clinical case

Title

The title is the first component of a clinical case. Therefore, it should be concise, informative, and relevant to the subject. The ideal title should attract attention and state the focus on a particular issue, without being too cumbersome.

Case description

The case description is the focus of the clinical case. The case is best presented in chronological order and in enough detail for the audience to establish his or her own conclusions about the case's validity. The current medical condition and medical history, including relevant family history, should be clearly described in chronological order, typically comprising clinical history, physical examination findings, investigative results, including imaging and laboratory results, differential diagnosis, management, follow-up, and final diagnosis.

Important negative findings should also be provided. The author's own interpretation or inferences should be avoided in the body of a clinical case. Tables/figures should be used to reveal chronological findings or to compare observations using different methods.

It is worth noting that patient confidentiality must be preserved. Patient demographics such as age and gender, and occasionally, race and occupation are referred to in the first sentence. In order to reduce the possibility of identifying the patient, the patient's initials, date of birth, and other identifiers such as hospital number must not be used.

Discussion

The discussion is the most important section of the clinical case. It serves to summarise and interpret the key findings of the case, to contrast the case with what is already known and justify its uniqueness, to derive new knowledge and applicability to practice, and to draw clinically useful conclusions.

Conclusion

A clinical case will not have as much potential impact on the clinical practice of healthcare as randomised controlled trials or research articles. However, clinical cases provide valuable sources of new and unusual information for clinicians to share their anecdotal experiences with individual cases, make others aware of unusual presentations or complications, and deliver the educational and teaching message.