EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE: CASE REPORT AND CASE SERIES

Health professionals will often describe challenging or unusual clinical situations. Some journals include a section on case reports. While these cases can be used for teaching and review purposes, they can also have a role in research. Case reports and case series may be the first description of a clinical condition or the effect of a treatment.

Case reports and case series
Case reports and case series are descriptive studies. A case report typically describes a single patient. It is normally the report of something that has happened or has been observed, that is, the report is retrospective. Case reports normally focus on the manifestations, clinical course, and prognosis or outcome for the patient.

In a case series, the researcher may describe a set of patients that they have seen who show similar symptoms or outcomes. Or, the researcher might have searched for similar cases in the literature to try and identify the issue.

Some researchers will use a case series to test the effect of a treatment. A case series, unlike a case control study, does not have a control arm.

Advantages and disadvantages of case reports
Case reports and case series can help to identify new clinical issues and may lead to development of hypotheses. However, they are normally regarded as low level evidence as the observations may be subject to bias.

There are several important disadvantages of a case series. First, if the report or series is retrospective, it will depend on the availability and accuracy of the data records. Second, a case series is subject to selection bias because the clinician or researcher self-selects the cases. Third, a case series does not have a control arm so it is not possible to compare what is happening with others who do not have the condition or treatment. These sources of bias mean that the findings reported may not be generalisable to a larger population of patients.

For Further Information
- [BMJ Case Reports](#)
  This journal publishes case reports that they see as having valuable clinical lessons.
- [Three-minute critical appraisal of a case series article](#)