

## Case reports on leprosy: an agile way of sharing the knowledge and experiences of professionals in this area

**Relatos de casos em hanseníase: uma modalidade ágil de compartilhar o conhecimento e as experiências dos profissionais que atuam nesta área**

**Informes de casos sobre la lepra: una forma ágil de compartir los conocimientos y experiencias de los profesionales que trabajan en este campo**

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The purpose of a case report is to document a rare, sometimes unheard-of event or one that has peculiar aspects in terms of clinical history, symptoms, epidemiology, target population, diagnostic techniques, and therapeutic approach. This type of scientific publication, as old as medicine itself, was perhaps one of the most important ways of disseminating the scientific knowledge produced in the medical sciences during Egyptian civilization, especially for the father of medicine, Hippocrates. Therefore, it is believed that this type of study, besides being the 'germ cell,' is also relevant and significant for scientific production in the biomedical field<sup>1</sup>.

In times of evidence-based medicine, with sophisticated information technologies at

our disposal, it is almost imperative for scientific journals in the biomedical field to publish robust studies, such as meta-analyses, randomized clinical trials, and systematic reviews. Case reports have faced considerable criticism throughout history, so many journals are reluctant to accept this type of study, as they are relatively simple and quick to produce, do not allow comparisons with a control group, or at different times, such as before and after. Consequently, it occupies the penultimate position in the hierarchy of scientific evidence proposed by Yusef et al.<sup>2</sup>.

However, despite the lack of scientific rigor inherent in case reports, its importance to biomedical sciences cannot be ignored. It has the potential to be one of the most agile forms of scientific communication to warn of new diseases, epidemics, and adverse effects of drugs that have not been detected during experimental studies with laboratory animals or clinical trials on human beings. It is worth remembering that even in a clinical trial, knowledge of a drug is incomplete, and many adverse effects may arise during its marketing in the pharmacovigilance phase. At this stage, case reports can be indispensable for mitigating potential harm to medication users. One example is what happened with thalidomide in the 1960s when it was used for nausea during pregnancy. In addition, we can list the first case of endometriosis, described by Rokitansky in 1860 in India, and the first reports of AIDS cases in the 1980s<sup>3</sup>.

There is a trend in some scientific journals towards more restrictive policies regarding publishing case reports. However, fortunately, journals with a high impact factor, such as *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The Lancet*, still publish case reports. This was confirmed by conducting a preliminary search on *PubMed* for clinical case reports, using the following descriptors: Hansen's disease, *leprosy*, Hansen's disease reactions, and *M. leprae*, in the period 2023-2024. Fifty-eight case reports were identified, the title of which included at least one of these descriptors, showing that this method is still widely used in biomedical literature, contributing to scientific knowledge, particularly in Hansenology.

In this context, the editorial team of the journal *Hansenologia Internationalis* believes that the publication of case reports still preserves its importance and continues to enrich scientific knowledge about Hansen's disease, thus improving the daily practice of professionals who care for individuals affected by this disease.



Another aspect in which case reports should be considered as a means of speeding up the dissemination of knowledge in the context of Hansen's disease is the chronic, infectious character that results from infection by *M. leprae*, a very silent bacillus not cultivated in artificial culture media. Its growth only occurs when inoculated into experimental animals, but even then, this proliferation is very slow, which requires very long and expensive experiments. These biological characteristics also impact the clinical manifestations of the disease in infected individuals, hindering early diagnosis and therapeutic approaches that reduce the possibility of disabling sequelae. Consequently, clinical trials will also require more time for completion and publishing<sup>4</sup>.

In light of the above, the editorial team of the journal *Hansenologia Internationalis: Leprosy and Other Infectious Diseases* and the board of the Alliance Against Leprosy (AAL) share the understanding that scientific dissemination on leprosy through clinical case reports represents an opportunity to promote the rapid spread of knowledge. This contributes to the training of healthcare professionals, enabling them to diagnose and treat individuals affected by leprosy more promptly, thereby reducing the transmission of the bacillus and the occurrence of disabling sequelae.

For this reason, the AAL is encouraging the publication of a special section for the 2024 issue of *Hansenologia Internationalis*, entitled "Case Reports in Hansen's Disease – Shared Practice," offering a prize to the three reports that obtain the best scores.

In this sense, AAL goes beyond the boundaries of philanthropy. In addition to focusing on assisting people affected by Hansen's disease, its actions also center on disseminating high-quality scientific, educational, and social information. This will positively impact the professional training of those involved in the treatment of Hansen's Disease.

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