

Publishing Case Reports and Case Series in Indian Biomedical Journals - Ethical Issue Often Neglected

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In recent times data generation in human subjects has become a major concern across the world. But most data revolves around randomized controlled trials. The ethical issues involved in observational studies, questionnaire based studies etc. in general receive less attention. At the other extreme interesting observation and a rare observation in a rare clinical setting often encourage the physician to report and publish in the form of case report and case series. The ethical issues involved in data capture in case studies are often not addressed sufficiently. Personal communication with the member of different ethics committees in the countries reveals that very rare if ever; the prospective author of a case report approaches the ethics community for ethics review. Neither do the ethics committee have clear guidelines on their stand on ethics review

(perhaps retrospective) of case series and case reports manuscript, while there is at least one major ethics element involved, namely patients right to confidentiality and privacy and non disclosure of identity to a third party. In an article published earlier the informed consent and confidentiality in a case report is given great importance [1]. Striking a balance between protecting patients and providing sufficient detail to make case studies useful with prior informed consent is a central ethical challenge of case study publication [2]. No wonder a preliminary search on requirement of the editorial committee of different biomedical journals published from India to look for editorial requirements [Table/Fig-1] reflects that this issue is not quite adequately addressed.

Sl. No	Name of the journal	Published Case Report	Word Limit	Reference Limit	Indexed with Pubmed/MEDLINE/Index Medicus	Patient's consent to publish a case report/series
1	The Indian Journal of Dermatology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Necessary
2	Indian Journal of Pharmacology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Upto 5	Yes	Not clearly defined
3	Journal of Pharmacology & Pharmacotherapeutics	Yes	Less than 1400 words	Upto 6	Yes	Not clearly defined
4	Indian Journal of Ophthalmology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Not clearly defined. Must be accompanied by written permission to use the photograph.
5	Indian Journal of Anaesthesia	Yes	up to 1400 words	up 10 to 15 reference	Yes	Informed consent should be attached with the covering letter
6	Indian Journal of Public Health	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Copy of the informed consent should be attached with the covering letter.
7	The Indian Journal of Psychiatry	Yes	Maximum 1500 words	up to 10 references	Yes	Not clearly defined
8	Indian Journal of Dental Research	Yes	Up to 2000 words	up to 10 references	Yes	Copy of the informed consent should be attached with the covering letter.
9	The Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology, and Leprology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	A scanned copy of the informed consent can be uploaded as supplemental file at the time of submission
10	The Indian Journal of Orthopaedics	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Informed consent for this purpose requires that the patient be shown the manuscript to be published. When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter
11	Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports	Yes	no more than 2000 words	maximum of 15 references	None	Informed consent is compulsory. It should provide a statement to confirm that the patient has given their informed consent for the case report to be published. You do not need to send the form to us on submission, but we may request to see a copy at any stage (including after publication)
12	Indian Journal of Radiology and Imaging	Yes	Not clearly defined	Not clearly defined	Yes	Copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
13	Journal of Cancer Research and Therapeutics	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.

14	Indian Journal of Cancer	Case report can be published in letter to editor section	Up to 400 words	4 references	Yes	Informed consent for this purpose requires that the patient be shown the manuscript to be published. When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
15	Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
16	Indian Journal of Urology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 5 references	Yes	Copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
17	Indian Dermatology Online Journal	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
18	Indian Journal of Nephrology	Yes	Maximum 1200 words	Maximum 15 references	Yes	Not clearly defined
19	Journal of Postgraduate Medicine	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
20	The Indian Journal of Medical Research	As short notes, clinical image, or letter to editor	These should be about 1000-1500 words	Not specified.	Yes	Necessary during submission. Specific format is available.
21	Indian Journal of Medical and Paediatric Oncology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
22	Indian Journal of Critical Care Medicine	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Not specified	Yes	Not clearly defined
23	The Indian Journal of Palliative Care	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	Yes	Not clearly defined
24	Indian Journal of Paediatrics	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	The patient's written consent, or that of the next of kin, to publication must be obtained, and the same must be affirmed /stated on the Title page.
25	Lung India	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	Yes	Not clearly defined
26	Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research	Yes	Up to 1200 words excluding references and abstract	Up to 15 references	Yes	Not clearly defined
27	The National Medical Journal of India	Yes	approx. 700 to 1200 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes, Index Medicus (MEDLINE)	If it is not possible to ensure anonymity, written, informed consent should be obtained from the patient and submitted to the Journal.
28	Indian Journal of Medical Sciences	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
29	Journal of Association of Physicians of India	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	None	informed consent from subjects is needed
30	Annals of Cardiac Anaesthesia	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	MEDLINE/ Index Medicus	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
31	Asian Journal of Transfusion Science	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
32	Indian Journal of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	None	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
33	Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	Yes	Not clearly defined
34	Indian Journal of Maternal and child Health	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	None	Not clearly defined
35	Indian Journal of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	None	Not clearly defined
36	Journal of Indian Association of Paediatric Surgeons	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Not clearly defined
37	Indian Journal of Surgery	Yes	Maximum 800 words	Maximum 08 references	None	Not clearly defined
38	Indian Journal of Surgical Oncology	Yes	Maximum 7500 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	Not clearly defined

39	Indian Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery	Yes	Not specified	Not specified	None	Informed consent is required
40	Industrial Psychiatry Journal	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
41	Journal of Human Reproductive Sciences	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
42	Journal of Minimal Access Surgery	Yes	Maximum 700 words	Maximum 05 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.
43	Neurology India	Yes	Maximum 1000 words	Maximum 10 references	Yes	When informed consent has been obtained, it should be indicated in the article and copy of the consent should be attached with the covering letter.

[Table/Fig-1]: Editorial requirements for reporting case report / case series in some Indian Biomedical Journals

A random search on 43 Indian Biomedical Journals [Table/Fig-1] in the internet revealed that almost one third (33.33%) of them does not mention any informed consent submission for case report/case series publication in author's guideline. Almost another one third (30.95%) of the journals has made it mandatory for submission of informed consent and the rest kept the option open and does not mandate. Although esteemed journal demand for furnishing informed consent documents in reporting of case report/series and other articles at the final stage of submission of the manuscript but these issues is not very clearly dictated in the author's guideline published in their website. There is a natural expectation from the publishing authors to perceive this issue with greater clarity by the editorial board of various journals while attempting for publication.

The issue of index or non indexed journal does not relate any way with compulsory informed consent process for reporting of case series/case reports. There is still much disharmony between the various journals although perhaps there is intense effort in creating uniformity on the part of the various journal editors. With the current scenario it is beyond the scope of evaluation whether the journals are really putting effort to enforce this ethical issue for publishing case reports/case series.

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