9. SEARCHING THE INTERNET FOR INFORMATION RELEVANT TO YOUR CASE

When writing a case report/series, you will want to place it in the larger context. For example, you may wish to have some basic epidemiological facts about the disease you are reporting; you may wish to look at other case reports of the condition you are looking at; you may wish to have background information on the country where you are reporting from, etc.

9.1. Conducting a simple literature search with PubMed

In order to do so, you will need to start out by conducting a simple literature search, i.e. look for studies published in health sciences journals. The easiest way to do this is to go to the database of the (American) National Library of Medicine, called "PubMed".

To access PubMed, either type "pubmed" in your search engine or copy the following link in your browser: https://www.ncbi.nih.gov/pubmed

On the Homepage you will see in the column on the left tutorials and a quick start guide to get you acquainted with the database and how to use it. But because this can be daunting to begin with, below you will find some basic steps to follow in order to conduct a simple literature search on a subject of interest.

Let's say you want to write a case report on a patient in sub-Saharan Africa suffering from Kala Azar. You know that the highest prevalence for the disease is in Sudan, so you figure you will look for articles on Kala Azar in Sudan. So now try typing exactly that "Kala Azar Sudan" in the PubMed browser: you obtain over 400 results. This is because the database is showing you all articles which contain the words Kala Azar and/or Sudan. You will see that PubMed offers you "best matches" and "best match order", but still yields a large number of non-specific results.

The best way to refine your search is to make sure you are using the right key words or "medical subheadings". On the PubMed Homepage in the third column to the right, click on MeSH Terms. The

MeSH terms browser allows you: a) to identify the correct MeSH terms corresponding to your key world, and b) to build a search. So let's start.

1) Type in "kala azar": the MeSH term proposed is: "Visceral Leishmaniasis". Add this term to the Search Builder.

2) Now you want to make sure that "Sudan" exists as a MeSH term. Type "Sudan" in the MeSH browser. The first MeSH terms proposed is indeed "Sudan". So tick the corresponding box and add this term to the Search Builder. Now you have: "Visceral Leishmaniasis AND Sudan".

3) Try searching PubMed with the above search. You obtain over 200 results – half the amount when you searched PubMed without MeSH terms, but still too many to handle. So the next step is to refine your search.

4) What you are looking for are in fact clinical descriptions of cases of visceral leishmaniasis occurring in Sudan. So you need to find the appropriate MeSH term. Try typing in your first idea: "clinical case". The first MeSH term proposed is the one you are looking for "Case Reports" encompassing both clinical case reports and series.

5) Now build your PubMed Search using the following MeSH terms: "Visceral Leishmaniasis AND Sudan AND Case reports". You obtain fewer than 10 results all of which are specific to your search.

Your results are presented on a page with bibliographic references only. If the article has been published in open access, meaning that you can read it without paying a subscription fee, it is indicated. If it does not say "Free Article", that means that only the abstract is available. Click on the article title to see the abstract. The abstract serves to distil the key information so that a reader can rapidly comprehend if the article is of interest to him/her as well as its main message.

When you click on the abstract of an article, you will find other information of interest. To your left, PubMed suggests "Similar articles". And below, by clicking on MeSH terms, you can see all the key words used to index the article you're looking at. This can be very useful for building your own searches.

9.2. Using the WHO website for the latest data relevant to your case

Often, you will want to have the latest available epidemiological or humanitarian figures relevant to your case. For many epidemic diseases you will find the latest available statistics on the WHO website.

1) Type WHO in your search engine, or copy-paste https://www/who.int in your browser. On the WHO Home page, to the extreme left you will see "Health Topics".

2) Click on "L" for "Leishmaniasis" and you will see it appear on the list.

3) Click on "Leishmaniasis" and you will come to a health topic page with lots of information and further resources.

There are many other information resources available, but if you have conducted a careful search in PubMed and consulted the latest figures on the WHO website, you can be confident that you have covered the basic material.