Word for Word

When to use manage in medicine

In medical writing, the word *manage* is often used incorrectly.

According to the *AMA Manual of Style*, it’s best to avoid the use of *manage* when referring to patients, since its use in this context is dehumanizing. It’s usually preferable to say that patients are *treated* or *cared for*.

**Not preferred:** He published a paper on the *management* of patients with COVID-19.

**Preferred:** He published a paper on the *treatment* of patients with COVID-19.

The *AMA Manual of Style* gives several examples, however, of when using the word *management* to refer to a patient is acceptable:

- When referring to a general treatment protocol (e.g., “the clinical management of the seriously ill patient”).
- When referring to a patient whose care does not involve specific interventions but may involve watchful waiting (as with prostate cancer).
- When referring to monitoring or periodic evaluations of a patient (e.g., “Patient management will involve follow-up CT scans every 6 months.”).

The use of *manage* when referring to cases is also acceptable. This is because the word *case* refers to a specific instance of a disease, not to a specific person.

**Preferred:** The new physician manages all cases of flu in the clinic.
Symptoms and diseases can be either managed or treated, depending on the meaning of the sentence.

**Acceptable:** The patient’s pain is being managed (i.e., kept in control) by NSAIDs.

**Acceptable:** The patient’s breast cancer was treated (i.e., alleviated or reduced) successfully.

Reference

*AMA Manual of Style.*


--Tammy Locke

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