Naturalistic observation during the process of clinical care results in “Level 1 Evidence,” e.g. “clinical impressions” reported retrospectively.

Level 1 evidence is greatly limited and therefore often disrespected. Nevertheless, carefully gathered, honestly reported naturalistic observations are the ultimate basis for prospective clinical investigations which, if done carefully and reported honestly, result in statistically valid “scientific truth.”

To pursue higher levels of evidence on the nature or treatment of a disorder, it is necessary for someone to have previously cared for many patients in order to “get the feel” for what they and their disorder are like. The study and analysis of literature is necessary, but not sufficient. One must experience Nature in order to know it. Without the acumen acquired through experience, inquisitiveness and commitment, discernment is weak. Clinical investigators with weak discernment have published studies of elegant design and statistical power based on pre-conceptions rather than existential reality.

Therefore, the integrity of higher levels of evidence – and the extent to which they approximate “scientific truth” - depends upon the integrity of the Level 1 evidence that preceded them.

D.R.F.