MEDICINE AND THE MEDIA

A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP?

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HOW MANY OF YOU WATCHED THE TODAY SHOW THIS AM?

HOW MANY SAW SOMETHING ABOUT HEALTH? WHAT WAS IT?
REPORT: Ebola Coverage On TV News Plummeted After Midterms

Outlets Air Nearly 1,000 Ebola Segments In 4 Weeks Before Midterms, Only 50 Segments In 2 Weeks After Elections

In early October, the GOP developed a plan to make the federal government’s response to Ebola a central part of its midterm elections strategy. Television media played into Republicans’ hands, helping to foment panic about the disease. Following the diagnosis of a handful of U.S. Ebola patients, the major broadcast networks ran nearly 1,000 segments about the virus in the four weeks leading up to the elections. Coverage of the disease plummeted in the two weeks following Election Day, with the same networks running fewer than 50 total segments.

Massive Disparity In Ebola Coverage Before And After Election Day

Evening Broadcast And Cable News Aired Nearly 1,000 Segments On Ebola In The Four Weeks Before Election Day. Between October 7 and November 3, the four weeks before the midterm elections, evening broadcast and cable news collectively aired 975 segments on the Ebola virus. CNN focused on Ebola-related coverage the most, with 335 total segments before the elections. Fox News followed with 281 segments, and MSNBC aired 222. CBS led the broadcast networks with 54 segments. NBC followed with 44, and ABC aired 39 segments.

Ebola Coverage Dropped Dramatically Following The Midterms. In the two weeks following the elections, evening broadcast and cable news have only aired 49 total segments related to Ebola. CNN’s 335 segments in the four weeks preceding the election dropped to just 10 segments in the two weeks after the elections. Fox
Ebola Segments On Evening Cable News

39 segments.

Ebola Coverage Dropped Dramatically Following The Midterms. In the two weeks following the elections, evening broadcast and cable news have only aired 49 total segments related to Ebola. CNN's 335 segments in the four weeks preceding the election dropped to just 10 segments in the two weeks after the elections. Fox News' 281 segments dropped to 10. MSNBC's 222 segments dropped to 13. CBS' 54 segments dropped to six, NBC’s 44 segments dropped to five, and ABC’s 39 segments dropped to four.

Networks: CNN, Fox News, MSNBC 5PM-10PM

10/7/2014-11/17/2014
Ebola Segments On Evening Broadcast News

Graph showing the number of Ebola segments on evening broadcast news.

mediamatters.org

GOP Made Ebola "Central" To Campaign Strategy As Media Coverage Became Hysterical

Republicans Wanted To Make Ebola Response "Central In Their Attacks Against Democrats." According to an October 9 New York Times report, Republicans sought to make "questions of how safe we are," including from Ebola, a primary focus of their campaigns.
In Cable Ebola Coverage, It’s the Story vs. the Facts

James Poniewozik  @poniewozik  Oct. 24, 2014

As the disease comes to New York City, 24-hour news waves between science and sensationalism. But what does Gene Simmons think?

The guest on Friday’s Fox News’s panel show Outnumbered gave a damning assessment of the...
Today’s Random Medical News

from the New England Journal of Panic-Inducing Gastroenterology

Can Cause

Exercise

Hypothermia

Sex

Choking

Beer Wine

Senility

Smoking

Stress

Glaucoma

Sneezing

Migraine

Depression

Cancer

Headache

AIDS

Weight Gain

Children

Two-income Families

Men 20

Women 7 out of 10

According to a report released today...
A BRIEF HISTORY

- The 1950’s and 1960’s marked an era in which traditional barriers between the worlds of medicine and media were broken down with popular programs like *Ben Casey* and *Marcus Welby M.D.*
- Medical news catapulted onto the American small screen in the 1980’s as the mental and physical health of President Ronald Reagan was a topic of public concern and interest.
- By the mid 1980’s medical reports on matters other than presidential health had become popular features in both print and electronic news media.
- Since the 1980’s medicine-media interactions have increased exponentially. Some of the major players include hospitals, physicians, commercial research institutions, television networks pharmaceutical companies etc. all clamoring for public attention via ads, news reports, feature stories, and even info-mercials.
Medical Journalism...

The collection, writing, and editing of current interest material on topics related to biomedicine for presentation through the mass media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, or television, usually for a public audience such as health care consumers.

– MeSH
Medical Journalists… Lay-people or Scientists?

- Presently there is no credentialing process that accompanies the medical journalist profession. (Meteorology standards)
- Of the major news networks medical journalists, 7 of 13 have doctoral degrees; 5 have MDs and 1 has no advanced degree
- How can journalists know how to decipher complex medical issues without training?
Educational Requirements

- Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism or Mass Communications
- Subject specialty
- Practical experience

-US Dept of Labor
Continuing Education

- Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ)
- American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)
- National Association of Science Writers (NASW)
- Medical Journalists’ Association/UK (MJA)
How Journalists Look At Themselves

Journalists’ agreement with various negative statements about the news media
(Fig. 5)

- **Lack Understanding**
  - Few members of the news media understand the nature of science and technology, such as the truthfulness of most scientific discovery and the complexities of results.
  - 77% Agree, 19% Disagree

- **Are More Interested in Sales**
  - The top managers of the news media are more interested in selling newspapers or increasing viewership than in telling the public what it needs to know.
  - 56% Agree, 37% Disagree

- **Focus on the Trendy**
  - Members of the news media who cover science and technology concentrate far too much on trendy discoveries rather than on basic research and development.
  - 67% Agree, 19% Disagree

- **Seek the Sensational**
  - Most members of the news media are more interested in sensationalism than in scientific truth.
  - 69% Agree, 22% Disagree

- **Want Instant Answers**
  - The news media do not cover science better because they are interested in instant answers and short-term results.
  - 52% Agree, 36% Disagree

- **Are Ignorant of Process**
  - Most members of the news media have no understanding of the process of scientific investigation.
  - 46% Agree, 42% Disagree

- **Can’t Interpret Results**
  - Most reporters have no idea how to interpret scientific results.
  - 48% Agree, 33% Disagree

- **Overblow Risks**
  - The news media have overblown the risks of consuming many substances or partaking in many activities, unduly scaring the public.
  - 45% Agree, 43% Disagree

- **Lack Education**
  - Most reporters who cover science are not well enough educated to cover science, new discoveries, and the latest developments.
  - 40% Agree, 59% Disagree

- **Rarely Get Details Right**
  - Most members of the news media rarely get the technical details about science and technology correct.
  - 62% Agree, 20% Disagree

- **Don’t Grasp Funding Need**
  - Most members of the news media have no appreciation of the need for funding for basic scientific research and development.
  - 53% Agree, 28% Disagree

- **Focus on Personalities**
  - Science reporting centers too much on personalities and not enough on actual findings.
  - 70% Agree, 13% Disagree

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How Scientists View The News Media (Journalists)

Scientists’ agreement with various negative statements about the news media

(Fig. 3)

- **Lack Understanding**: Few members of the news media understand the nature of science and technology, such as the tentativeness of most scientific discovery and the complications of results.
  - 91% Agree
  - 5% Disagree

- **More Interested in Sales**: The top managers of the news media are more interested in selling newspapers or increasing viewership than in telling the public what it needs to know.
  - 68% Agree
  - 4% Disagree

- **Focus on the Trendy**: Members of the news media who cover science and technology concentrate far too much on trendy discoveries rather than on basic research and development.
  - 79% Agree
  - 7% Disagree

- **Seek the Sensational**: Most members of the news media are more interested in sensationalism than in scientific truth.
  - 76% Agree
  - 13% Disagree

- **Want Instant Answers**: The news media do not cover science better because they are interested in instant answers and short-term results.
  - 75% Agree
  - 20% Disagree

- **Are Ignorant of Process**: Most members of the news media have no understanding of the process of scientific investigations.
  - 69% Agree
  - 18% Disagree

- **Can’t Interpret Results**: Most reporters have no idea how to interpret scientific results.
  - 66% Agree
  - 18% Disagree

- **Overblow Risks**: The news media have overblown the risks of consuming many substances or participating in many activities, unduly alarming the public.
  - 61% Agree
  - 20% Disagree

- **Lack Education**: Most reporters who cover science are not well enough educated to cover news about scientific and technological affairs.
  - 58% Agree
  - 18% Disagree

- **Rarely Get Details Right**: Most members of the news media rarely get the technical details about science and technology correct.
  - 56% Agree
  - 24% Disagree

- **Don’t Grasp Funding Need**: Most members of the news media have no appreciation of the need for funding for basic scientific research and development.
  - 54% Agree
  - 20% Disagree

- **Focus on Personalities**: Science reporting centers too much on personalities and not enough on actual findings.
  - 49% Agree
  - 28% Disagree

Major Types of Media Outlets

- Newspapers
- Television Networks
- Cable News Networks
- Internet
- Medical Journals and Publications
What Percentage of the Population Gets Their Medical Information from the Media?

70%!!!

-NEJM “REPORT ON MEDICAL MEDIA” JAN 2006
Author Mark Twain once said.....

“...Be careful about reading health books, you may die of a misprint...”
Pitfalls of Medical Reporting

• The “rush to report”
• “You too” syndrome
• News worthiness
• Data can be inaccurate or skewed (not statistically significant) is $p<0.05$
• Commercialization of medical research (business and profit)
Journalism vs. Science

- Scientists are trained to qualify their findings.
- Journalists see qualification as obscuring the truth.
- For scientists, a story is just one piece of information in a large pool of data.
- For the journalist, the story can create an indelible impression on the viewer that will over-ride discussion and could be misleading.
To Journal Or Not To Journal: That Is The Question!

• Is there still a place for the “old school” medical journal?

Pro- “impartial” scientific Information is always needed

Con- delays the free flow of medical information to public

• Ingelfinger Rule-stipulates that a scientist may not publish to the media before being peer reviewed.
The Scientific Community and the Media

- Scientists also shoulder some of the responsibility for accurate reporting, but downplaying the potential of their research could compromise the funding upon which their projects depend.

- With the scientific community and the media so heavily invested in finding and reporting the next major “breakthrough,” ethical standards become increasingly crucial in disseminating information to the public.
The Relationship Between Doctors and Medical Journalists

• Whereas, physicians are wary of whistle-blowing for fear of lawsuits and even losing their jobs, journalists believe it is their professional duty to be watchdogs—uncovering problems and questioning the establishment.

• The physician-journalist relationship is fraught with distrust; reporters believe their stories empower the patient, while physicians believe these same stories compromise their professional autonomy and the patient-physician relationship.
THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR

Don’t drink the Kool-Aid!!!
Personalized Marketing Campaigns

- Marketing firms are now obtaining patient lists detailing identifying individuals with specific disease profiles and selling them to pharmaceutical companies.

- Marketing Firms boast great success with personalized campaigns.
  - “These [patients] consumers are highly responsive to the offers such as: subscriptions, fundraising, mobility aids and various other types of medical products and services.”

- HIPAA Compliance: Obtaining patient information in this manner is not illegal but may be ethically questionable.
TELEVISION

Medical News Hits the Small Screen
…Have you seen the latest episode of Grey’s Anatomy…

- Everything changed in 1994
- Extremely realistic nature and accuracy is unprecedented
- Does this enhance or detract from medical education
TV Shows

• 70 medically themed programs have aired since the 1970’s: top rated programs increase medical school applications

• Reality shows like “Extreme Makeover” and “The Swan” increased the number of cosmetic surgeries performed by 65%

• Medical reality TV is a “fallacy” in many respects.
  – Television “Codes” have much better outcomes than Real Life “Codes” 67% live on TV, 16% survive in reality.

AMA Journal of Ethics 3/2007 volume 9 #3
INTERNET

The World Wide Medical Web
THE EVIL INTERNET!!!

• Web MD alone gets 40 million hits per month!!
• Web MD: Inventor of the “cyberchondriac”
Public Reaction: More Good Them Harm?

• Medical news creates an informed patient population.
• Informed patients are more likely to be “partners” with their physicians.
• Patients are empowered to keep themselves healthy and increased office visits for check-ups and routine screenings demonstrate this trend.
• Not all effects or positive: Patient paranoia increases ER visits.
• First Do No Harm: Hippocratic Oath….
How Can We Help?

- Facilitate access to print/electronic resources and question as well as credential medical experts
- Educate and consult with medical journalists regarding HIPAA, PHR and health literacy issues
- Work together to inform health care consumers
Doctors bury their mistakes.
Lawyers hang them.
But journalists put theirs on the front page..

- anonymous
GOOD LUCK AND GOOD NEWS!!!!

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