

Summary: Why does health journalism matter?

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- Most of the public get their information about health from the media, and misleading information can affect people's health.
- Health as an issue affects everyone and has universal appeal.
- The main sources of health news for most people are the mainstream media and even glancing at a headline will have an effect, which can easily be contrary to the meaning of the whole article.
- The specialist health press have much smaller circulations and are printed weekly or less often.
- Most health reporters have little if any specialised training and training courses in health journalism are few and take small numbers.
- Few employers will invest in training for health journalists.
- This means most health journalists are self-taught.
- Health journalists are under similar pressures as non-specialists with the thinning out of newsrooms.
- News values such as relevance and timeliness do not encourage a balanced or scientific critique.
- Simplification, the need to associate news with celebrity, fame or elites, and the preference for bad news also act against balanced health reporting. Reporting advances as good news can also over-state the case and be prone to simplification.
- Taking a critical attitude is vital for good health journalism
- This applies equally to reporting on health policy as in other areas, which can disenfranchise people if done poorly.