

Summary: why health journalism matters in Africa

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- South Africa faces daunting health challenges. There will be 400,000 new cases of AIDS/HIV this year alone.
- The prevalence of 'lifestyle' health conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes are also causes for concern but many people remain ignorant about these in South Africa, because of failings in the health-information ecosystem: poor information from schools, the home, healthcare and government.
- Health journalists in South Africa have to be advocates of health information as well as critical writers as a result. This can be contradictory.
- The five elements of effective and ethical health journalism seek to address this:
 1. Veracity – an expanded notion of authenticity and fact checking.
 2. Transparency – the need to avoid pseudo-science and remain objective.
 3. Inclusivity – avoiding 'othering' and alienation of people with disease.
 4. Engagement – how to get the story across without sensationalising but maintaining interest.
 5. Empowerment – giving people a sense of what they can do about something.
- Striking the right balance between educational advocacy and critical journalism is the central challenge of health journalism in Africa.