

Media Plays a Crucial Role When it Comes to Accurate, Reliable, and Responsible Health Reporting

Media and journalists play a crucial role when it comes to disseminating health news and information. Accurate health reporting is crucial in informing the public about important issues that impact the well-being of society. Media serves as an important source of knowledge for individuals and helps them to make important decisions about their health while serving to raise awareness about critical issues concerning health such as health disparities, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), infectious diseases, and so on. Media has a crucial role in informing and educating people to address the growing challenge of NCDs by raising awareness, providing accurate information to contribute to healthier behaviours.

This way, health reporting empowers citizens to protect themselves from different diseases and also enables them to have a say in different policies by the government concerning public health.

Nonetheless, there is a great responsibility when it comes to health reporting. Lack of accuracy in health reporting can lead to misinformation. Therefore, it is very important for media outlets and journalists to be careful and committed to accuracy and integrity since health is a very important and sensitive topic. Thus, in collaboration with experts and experienced journalists on health reporting, we have come up with the following guidelines to ensure that reporting on health is accurate, reliable, and responsible.

Verify Sources and Their Accuracy

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Before using your sources in your reporting always verify their credibility and accuracy. Make sure that the sources you are using are either experts in the field or come from reputable organizations, such as academic institutions, health institutions, recognized medical professionals, or peer-reviewed studies.

Avoid Sensationalism

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Avoid the ideas to sensationalize, or create alarmist headlines and content. Always stick to the facts, and use measured language while reporting and communicating, to prevent unnecessary panic or misinformation.

Understand the Topic You Are Reporting On and Its Scientific Basis

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Invest time in understanding the topic and the scientific basis of the health topic you're covering. Health topics can be complex. Make sure to present them in a way that is easy for the audience to understand. Provide context and background information is necessary. Providing scientific evidence makes the article more credible and more informative to the reader.

Provide Context of the Topic You Are Covering

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Give your audience the broader context of health challenge, such as relevant statistics, and potential future implications.

Use Plain Language

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Use clear, concise, and straightforward language that can be easily understood by a broad audience. Avoid medical jargon that can be difficult to understand and can cause misunderstanding.

Respect Privacy and Ethics

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Always obtain consent when interviewing or photographing individuals in healthcare settings to protect patient privacy and confidentiality.

Present a Balanced View

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Include several perspectives when reporting or covering a particular issue, to provide a well-rounded view of the topic. Avoid promoting just one side of the story, or even biased viewpoints, and ensure that opinions are fairly represented.

Fact-Check and Correct Errors

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Thoroughly fact-check all information and sources before publishing your article or reporting. If errors are discovered, try to correct them on time and transparently

Prevent Conflicts of Interest

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Avoid any potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that may influence your reporting. Follow ethical standards, including honesty, fairness, accountability, objectivity, and confidentiality.

Provide Information and Guidance

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When appropriate, provide service information or guidance that can help the public make informed decisions about their health and their well-being, such as information about preventive measures, or vaccination schedules.

Avoid Discrimination

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Do not mention people's sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, or so on, in case they are not necessary for the reporting, since such references most of the time cause discrimination. Also, use respectful language and avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

Engage with Your Audience

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When reporting, make sure to provide channels such as visuals or vivid narrative for readers or the audience who seek clarification or additional information.

Collaborate with Health Experts and Other Professionals From Different Institutions

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Collaborate with healthcare professionals and other professionals from different institutions when possible to ensure the accuracy, credibility, and relevance of your reporting.

Visual Storytelling

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The picture should be clearly related to the text. It should show diversity (gender, age, etc.) and avoid reproducing stereotypes. Get the consent of people photographed. Take creative shots (e.g. people interacting or close-ups instead of group shots or empty buildings, etc.)

Engaging the Reader

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Uses “all senses” to engage the audience, (e.g. sound) this way you can create a more immersive and realistic experience for your audience.

These guidelines for journalists on health reporting have been developed as a result of a two-day workshop with journalists on ethical health reporting, organized as an integral part of the International Symposium on Non-Communicable Diseases that took place in Kosovo in September 2023. Read more www.ncdsymposiumkosovo.org

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