

Can evidence-based news help the consumers and non-healthy professional to become more critical and aware of the safety and effectiveness of health interventions?

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The Problem

As technologies become increasingly advanced, news, including health news, spreads rapidly. A previous review has graded the accuracy of most medical news as unsatisfactory. The lack of knowledge by journalists, the lack of time to prepare a proper report, and the lack of space in publications are some barriers faced by health journalists. Thus, from the challenge to disseminate reliable health information and to ethically interpret medical data, Cásper Líbero School, in Brazil developed the 'Medicine and Journalism' course. This course aims to train journalists for interviewing physicians and health professionals. Search strategy on health databases is a mandatory subject in the course.

Objective

To report the teaching experience on the elaboration of health search strategies for journalists.

Methods

In this descriptive study we report the teaching experience during classes held in 2017 and 2018 at the Cásper Líbero-SP-Brazil School. The classes had the aim of discussing the importance of carrying out a health search strategy and evaluating current evidence before communicating health news. In these classes, students were taught how to elaborate health search strategies and where to find reliable health information. The data were obtained from the teachers' assessment and the students' verbal reports at the end of each class.

Key Results

- ✓Two classes (3 hours/class) were taught to a total of 38 journalists or journalism students. The content involved discussions on structuring the search strategy at MEDLINE via PubMed and CENTRAL-Cochrane Library;
- ✓Two practical classes were offered, including the formulation of clinical questions using the PICO acronym and the structuring of search strategies. Overall, the teachers graded the journalists' knowledge acquisition regarding basic search strategies in healthcare as satisfactory;
- ✓The students reported improving confidence in searching for reliable information on health databases and reported achieving a good level of knowledge to help formulate evidence-based questions for future health news communication.

Conclusion

The course has encouraged members to develop critical thinking on the formulation of relevant health questions. It has also helped journalists to perform search strategies in highly recommended databases for recovering reliable and evidence-based information. Courses such as the 'Medicine and Journalism' initiative can help reduce the spread of news about potentially harmful interventions or, without evidence of efficacy, effectiveness, and safety, as if they were beneficial.

Relevance to diversity:


- The access to evidence-based information for clinical decision-making is the most rational and safe way to lead and create awareness programs that will benefit the whole community.

Relevance to patients and consumers:

- The parents' decision-making of whether or not to vaccinate their children, can have an impact on the collective health.



Dissemination of knowledge about health search strategies for journalists in Brazil.

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