

Chapter 17

Health Journalism and Representation of Campaign News of Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Patients

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ABSTRACT

Health information in all forms and developments from media must benefit public health. The prime responsibility is to spread the correct information in a clear and simple way. The purpose of this study includes the evaluation of campaigns published in the Turkish press under expressions that were used specifically for reporting on spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) patients, such as “be hopeful” and “running out of time.” Discourse analysis method in the context of health journalism was used within a framework of ethical principles. In the context of this study, the discourse of language published—that is, news created by health journalists during treatment processes of SMA patients and their families—was also examined. This study was conducted in order to increase awareness of health correspondents and is informed by a basic principle of “first do no harm” to public health, consistent with medical professionals.

INTRODUCTION

The most basic needs of living things are to survive and, in a sense, the instinct of protecting their health. In the hierarchy of needs, Maslow gives the first place to “physiological needs” and the second place to “safety needs” (Senol, 2019). Feeling safe in a society is directly proportionate to being able to access the right information quickly and being on equal terms with other individuals. In this context, health literacy and health journalism are the fundamental needs of this basic need in order to get the right channel and then to reach the right treatment method. Health journalism is one of the areas where public health, in other words, public interest, should be considered at the highest level. The media should construct the

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presentation methods in health news in favor of the society and should continue its function by adhering to the principles of ethics and right-based journalism. In the light of this target; health journalism which is one of the specialization areas in the media should be examined, perhaps, as the most important type of journalism.

With the advancement of technology at the speed of seconds, having access to information in the area of health has also become easier. Today, individuals can immediately have access to general information about their own health or the health status of their relatives thanks to the internet and other mass media. In some cases, incompetent news sources which do not have any specialization in health are used and reporters who do not have any experience in health news become obliged to report this health news. In this information inflation; individuals are both exposed to the health news tabloidized by the mainstream media and may risk their health with the suggestions of various drug supplements where the estimates could be diagnoses, by not getting out of these frames of news prepared with commercial concerns. These commercial media discourses in the field of health cause the transferred information to increase in the direction of advertisement and product promotion, and cause this news to become a reflex. The goodwill and expectation of the individual, who tries to obtain information through the news but lacks medical information, are abused. These examples of journalism, which negatively affect public health, cause citizens to be unsure of the accuracy of the news and it creates public concern with the increase of the sense of insecurity.

According to Keane, market-based media is not perfect or smooth. Communication markets paralyze themselves. They create contradictions and dilemmas which are incompatible with the claims of openness, universality, and accessibility (Keane, 1993, p. 73).

The media, which is concerned about products or advertisements by commodifying the news in health information and which has a profit-oriented broadcast policy, needs a philosophy of responsibility which will protect the interests of society in the field of health by moving away from this point of view. In the aforementioned health information inflation, individuals can protect their health only with their high level of health literacy. Yavuz Baydar, the Journalist, degrades the social responsibility of the media to the design of the news as a professional service while he also degrades the ethical framework which guides the practice of producing news to the problem of establishing the impartiality of this service (Taş, 2012, p. 230).

Concept of Health Communication

With the development of technology in Turkey, as in many parts of the world, individuals have been reaching more detailed information about their health through mass media and the need of redesigning the doctor-patient relationship has emerged with this awareness in recent years. In this parallel, the discipline of health communication is a leading topic. Looking at health communication from a conceptual framework; it is seen that it has emerged as a research area that contributes to the improvement of the health of individuals and the public. It is possible to increase the awareness of the audience about any health problem and its solution, which is determined by the communication planning skills used in line with this goal.

Health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” by the World Health Organization (WHO). This definition reveals that health is affected by social variables beyond physical characteristics. With the recognition that health is affected by social and behavioral factors beyond physical factors, the discipline of health communication has gained importance. Health Communication

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