

New blog sorts health fact from fiction

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McMaster scientists are helping keep tabs on the factuality of public dialogue about health research through a new online publication hosted by Maclean's magazine.

"Science-ish", written by Julia Belluz, associate editor at The Medical Post, fact-checks claims made in the media and other areas of public discourse by weighing them against research-based evidence. The site aims to correct misleading headlines and inflammatory statements by journalists, politicians and other opinion leaders.

"Health research is only as important as its use," said Steven Hoffman, the adjunct faculty member at the McMaster Health Forum who initiated the project. "Information needs context, and that's what this partnership provides. It's a very McMaster project, given our history with and strengths in evidence-based medicine and knowledge translation."

As part of the initiative, Belluz learned to use of databases of systematic reviews - summaries of individual studies on particular topics - considered to be the most credible forms of evidence. She also draws on the collective knowledge of an advisory committee of McMaster faculty with expertise in the health system, public health and clinical issues.

"Our media partners are very open to new ways of thinking about how they do their journalistic work," said Hoffman. "Julia is an extremely talented journalist and has been doing a great job of tackling some very difficult topics."

Hoffman said the site is meant not only to correct inaccurate statements, but also to act as a resource for public figures so that research is used appropriately in the future.

"We're in a good position to challenge those who are abusing health knowledge, correct inaccuracies and provide resources so that it doesn't happen again," he said. "By doing that we hope to make the quality of health reporting that much better."

Since launching in June, the weekly blog has examined a range of topics including breast cancer screening, the safety of asbestos and genetically modified foods.

More information: www2.macleans.ca/category/blog...central/science-ish/

Provided by McMaster University

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