

# What do medical journalists think about cancer research?

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A new study published in *ecancermedicalscience* examines the intersection of medical journalism and cancer research.

Researchers at the University of Tokyo, Japan sent self-administered questionnaires to 364 medical journalists, who described their experiences in selecting stories, choosing angles, and performing research when creating cancer-centred news pieces.

The journalists reported that they did not find pharmaceutical press releases to be helpful, preferring direct contact with physicians as their most reliable and prized sources of information.

Medical journalists also report using social [media](#) and personal connections to support their research.

What about the impact on [cancer patients](#) and the public?

"Cancer information received through the media is often biased by journalists' [personal] interests," says author Dr Haruka Nakada of the University of Tokyo, noting that a large proportion of cancer stories in the media are "optimistic."

Nakada suggests that relying entirely on traditional media to understand cancer may distort patient expectations.

"Cancer patients and their family members should have a variety of

information sources -not only mass media, but also [social media](#), their doctors, or word-of-mouth communication among cancer patients."

All journalists reported difficulties in producing accurate and interesting cancer news stories. The most commonly reported concerns were the quality of source information, difficulty in understanding technical information, and a shortage of background knowledge.

Dr Nakada's team notes that these concerns are fair - and mounting. "As medical knowledge advances rapidly, journalists may have increasing difficulty covering cancer-related issues."

The take-home message? Dr Nakada's team cite the "Gefitinib scandal," which affected [cancer](#) treatment in Japan when overly optimistic media reports about the benefits of the "dream drug" led to unfortunate outcomes.

This highlights the need for responsible healthcare reporting, the team suggests, which can be attained through journalistic communication with researchers and physicians, and the willingness of healthcare professionals to explain their work carefully and clearly.

**More information:** Nakada Haruka, Tsubokura Masaharu, Kishi Yukiko, Yuji Koichiro, Matsumura Tomoko and Kami Masahiro (2015) How do medical journalists treat cancer-related issues? *ecancer* 9 502. [DOI: 10.3332/ecancer.2015.502](https://doi.org/10.3332/ecancer.2015.502)

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