

Collaboration between media and medical journals often leads to misinformation and hysteria

December 8 2016

When flawed clinical research is reported in the media with hype and sensationalism, it has the potential to have a devastating effect on patients, physicians, the scientific community and eventually society as a whole.

In a review article in the journal *EMBO Reports*, the authors question how controversial and weak studies are publicized by the media and often coupled with a narrative that is either false or with little scientific basis. The blame for misleading the public, they believe, should be shouldered equally by journalists, scientists, journal editors and research institutions.

As an example, the authors describe the changes in medical attitudes and practices regarding the use of [hormone replacement therapy](#) (HRT) in peri- and post-menopausal women following intense coverage of the Women's Health Initiative study. In 2002, the media reported that this large study had been prematurely halted after it showed greater risks of stroke, death and [invasive breast cancer](#) for women who took estrogen and progesterone compared with those who received placebo. Physicians called for immediate curtailment of HRT use in women and prescriptions fell by more than 80 percent and remained at that level for years. Today, healthcare experts still routinely reference this study as demonstrating the dangers of HRT despite the fact that a 2013 follow-up study reported no significant difference between HRT and placebo for

mortality or a long list of other adverse events.

"We believe that the collaboration between media and scientific journals in communicating advances in science and medicine to the public may result in misinformation and distortion. Unfortunately, this collaboration often exaggerates and allows bad science to be disseminated and shared. Media is often drawn to these controversial studies and they promote them with a narrative that is difficult to change even if it is wrong," explains lead author Abdulmageed M. Traish, PhD, professor of biochemistry and urology at Boston University School of Medicine. Traish and his colleagues believe a number of strategies could help prevent medical professionals and the general public from accepting distorted study results and their coverage in the media, including recognizing the collaboration between [medical journals](#); being wary of pronouncements from individuals who are unlikely to have clinical experience with a drug or treatment and recognizing the limitations of any one study since as many as 70 percent of the most highly cited studies eventually prove to be unreproducible.

Traish believes this critical analysis of how the [media](#) and medical journals promote questionable studies is of critical importance to the public, academics, policy makers and research institutions. "This is an issue that needs to be discussed, debated and taught to our medical students to be prepared to enter the real world of medicine and its complexities."

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

Citation: Collaboration between media and medical journals often leads to misinformation and hysteria (2016, December 8) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-12-collaboration-media-medical-journals-misinformation.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.