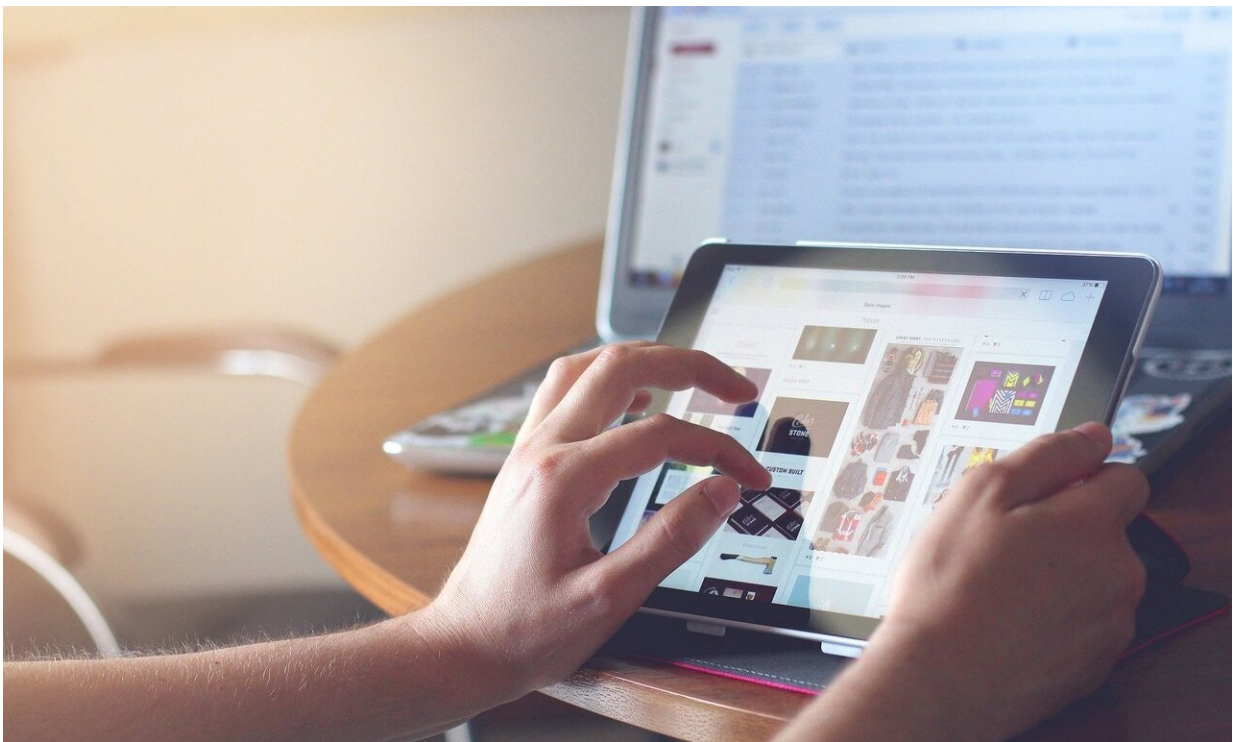


Evaluating the effect of spin in health care news

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Health care news stories represent an important source of information for patients. However, some evidence suggests that many news stories do not adequately explain research results and could mislead readers with spin, defined as "the presentation of information in a particular way, a slant, especially a favorable one." The danger of spin is that it can, for

example, convince patients that treatments are more promising than they actually are or minimize their risks.

In a study involving a University of Minnesota researcher, recently published in the journal *BMC Medicine*, researchers surveyed 900 patients/caregivers to evaluate the impact of [spin](#) in health [news stories](#).

They presented participants with two versions of news stories: a version with spin and a version rewritten without spin.

The results showed participants were more likely to believe the treatment was beneficial when news stories were reported with spin.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time the randomized controlled trial design has been used to explore the impact of spin in news stories," said Gary Schwitzer, an adjunct associate professor in the School of Public Health, and founder/publisher of HealthNewsReview.org, who contributed to the research. "This is important research because misinterpretation of the content of news stories due to spin could have important public health consequences as [news articles](#) can affect patient and public behavior."

Schwitzer said spin can originate in all stages of the flow of information from researchers to the public. He and his co-authors suggest spin can be managed by taking the following steps:

- Train researchers to understand how the public uses the media and, in response, frame their communication to the public in a way which is truthful, relevant, understandable and devoid of distortion or hype.
- Train public relations professionals, journalists and other communicators to detect spin and accurately convey research results.

- Educate [news](#) consumers on the resources available—such as HealthNewsReview.org, which is based in the University of Minnesota School of Public Health—to help them critically evaluate health claims.
- Support research for developing ideal approaches for communicating scientific and [health](#) information.

More information: Isabelle Boutron et al. Three randomized controlled trials evaluating the impact of "spin" in health news stories reporting studies of pharmacologic treatments on patients'/caregivers' interpretation of treatment benefit, *BMC Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s12916-019-1330-9](#)

Provided by University of Minnesota

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