

Less than two percent of US-funded cancer studies make the online news

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A new analysis of U.S.-funded cancer research shows that online news stories mention significantly fewer studies than do other forms of news media. Additionally, it highlights mismatches between relative prevalence or mortality of different cancer types and the amount of coverage they receive. Laura Moorhead of San Francisco State University and colleagues present these findings in the open-access

journal *PLOS ONE* on March 10, 2021.

The U.S. government mandates that federally funded research findings be made widely available. However, many people access health information via [news stories](#), meaning that journalists play a major role in determining what kinds of information is attained by the public. Despite this influence, little is known about which kinds of cancer studies get covered in the news.

To better understand news coverage of cancer studies, Moorhead and colleagues considered 11,436 [academic articles](#) published in 2016 that reported the results of U.S.-funded [cancer research](#) and analyzed the amount of coverage these studies received across 86 online news publications.

The analysis showed that only 1.88 percent of the studies were mentioned at least once in online news. Out of the 13 most prevalent cancer types in the U.S., only one—urinary and [bladder cancer](#)—received no news mentions. However, traditional news publications with an online presence, such as The New York Times, covered common cancer types significantly more often than news sites that started online, such as BuzzFeed or Breitbart News Network.

Furthermore, across all analyzed news sources, the amount of coverage received by different cancer types was misaligned with their relative mortality rates. Breast cancer received the most coverage compared to the number of deaths it causes, followed by prostate cancer, while pancreatic cancer received the least. News stories also tended to cover studies that had a surprising, entertaining, or sensationalist angle.

These findings could help inform further research into potential strategies to help the public access valuable research findings in understandable formats.

The authors add: "Our findings revealed that the coverage of cancer research by journalists differs from that published by other, mass media news producers. Findings highlight a misalignment between prevalent cancers and those cancers highlighted in online [news](#) media, as well as a tendency by journalists to report on [cancer](#) research with a particularly surprising, entertaining or sensationalist bent."

More information: Moorhead L, Krakow M, Maggio L (2021) What cancer research makes the news? A quantitative analysis of online news stories that mention cancer studies. *PLoS ONE* 16(3): e0247553. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247553

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