

Summary: Cancer reporting and news values

Barry Turner

- Cancer stories lend themselves to traditional news values.
- Two main types of cancer story are 'the scare story' and 'the medical breakthrough'.
- Military metaphors are common when describing cancer – 'fighting the battle' etc.
- Cancer is a major killer but is feared more than cardiovascular disease, which causes more deaths, and Alzheimer's disease, which also causes more deaths.
- There are 12 news frames that can be applied to cancer stories:
 - Threshold – can the reader identify?
 - Predictability – cancer is a predictable disease.
 - Individualisation – easily done with cancer.
 - Risk – the basis to all scare stories.
 - Sex – acquiring cancer through habits etc.
 - Celebrity – often 'battling' cancer.
 - Proximity – cultural relevance.
 - Violence – war metaphors etc.
 - Spectacle and children.
 - Conservatism – often tying in with populist values about resource allocation.
- Campaigns using PR highlight certain cancers, often based on political or commercial pressures rather than health issues.
- Some cancers are association with blame, 'bringing it on yourself' etc.
- Other cancer stories that could have informed the public about cancer do not run. This can leave the public less well informed than they could have been about issues that directly affect their health, eg side effects versus benefits.