The Power of Communication for Empowering People with Spinal Cord Injury

Samantha P. Go, Tanya A. Barretto, Salwa B.A. Malhas, Judy Illies

Neuroethics Canada, Division of Neurology, Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the landscape of news media coverage of spinal cord injury (SCI) research in English-speaking countries (Canada, the USA, Australia, the UK, and Ireland) with significant research activity.

BACKGROUND

• For ~20.6 million people living with SCI1, news media are a vital source for novel research developments2,3.
• News media feature both health-promoting and health-compromising content2.
• To meet the standard of beneficence, news media coverage must be accessible, scientifically accurate, and appropriately balanced3.

METHODS

• We mined 3 news aggregators (LexisNexis, Factiva, Canadian Newsstream) using the terms spinal cord injury and research, and their variants (Jan 2012 to Dec 2022).
• Articles were included if SCI and research were the foci. We present news media coverage of research on human models only.
• Data were extracted and coded by multiple reviewers for thematic analysis to identify research trends and ethics themes.

RESULTS (N=172)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CAN (N=42)</th>
<th>USA (N=39)</th>
<th>AUS (N=23)</th>
<th>UK (N=60)</th>
<th>IRL (N=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devices and technologies</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biologic and synthetic materials</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and behavioral interventions</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacological treatments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. International news media coverage per intervention type.

DISCUSSION

• There is a sharp drop-off in news coverage of SCI research after 2016.
• Canadian news focus on physical and behavioral interventions; the USA and the UK on devices and technologies; and, Ireland on biologic and synthetic materials.
• Beneficence and resilience are the primary ethics foci in news reporting.

CONCLUSION

Findings underscore the complex interplay between news media representation and ethical considerations in shaping discourse on SCI research.

REFERENCES


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