

COVID-19 | GUIDANCE FOR JOURNALISTS REPORTING ON CLINICAL TRIALS

Credible and informative reporting that keeps pace with the latest developments of the COVID-19 pandemic is desperately needed.

Reporting on complex clinical trials can be daunting for reporters and, if not done well, can contribute to fear and panic in the community.

Eight tips for reporting on this challenging aspect of this crisis.



DON'T RUSH TO BE FIRST



If a drug makes it to trial, that does not make it a cure. Don't raise expectations or speculate on what trials will find until you are sure of what you are reporting. Mentioning specific treatments may encourage people to source medication themselves.

ALWAYS VERIFY INFORMATION, EVEN WHEN IT COMES FROM KNOWN SOURCES



Ask for full copies of the research before you report on it, not just press releases or summaries. Consider building a relationship with a trusted source who you can work with to review your work.

KNOW YOUR TERMINOLOGY



Avoid complex terminology. If you have to use it, immediately explain the term using simple language. Avoid terms such as "guaranteed" or "miraculous" as nothing in medical science is guaranteed and medicine is not a miracle.

UNDERSTAND THE LIMITATIONS OF TRIALS



Not all trials are equal, learn to look for their limitations. What was the sample size? Has there been peer review? It is our responsibility to clearly explain the purpose of trials and their limitations to our audience.

REALITY CHECK



Trials and access to treatment in another country or context may vary wildly from where you are. Always localize your story to your context and the everyday reality of your audience. Are the findings affordable or appropriate for your context? Are there groups in the community who will not benefit?

BE CAREFUL WITH MATHS AND METAPHORS



Metaphors can be a great way to explain complex data. But make sure they don't distort or distract from the finding. Ensure you know how to calculate percentages and consider simple ways to express figures.

DON'T FORGET THE HUMANS



Don't get lost in the data. Remember that every trial may provide great relief or heartbreak to many real people. Never include a person's name, image or identifying details without consent.

CHECK AGAIN BEFORE YOU PUBLISH!!



Clinical trials are moving at an alarming pace. Always double check before you publish and include a date on your stories so that the audience can clearly see if information may be out of date.

