
Gary Schwitzer

Publisher, HealthNewsReview.org

University of Minnesota

“The level of health care investigative reporting has never been better - even in small and medium-sized newspapers. But the once- or twice- or three-times-a-year stories don’t make up for the daily drumbeat of stories. Health care reporting in this country is a disgrace day in and day out. The daily drumbeat is a disgrace. “There are no breakthroughs” - that should be the next paragraph in the story when anyone makes such a claim.”

Don Barlett

Pulitzer Prize winner

Investigative Journalist

HEALTH NEWS REVIEW.ORG

Grades for Health News Reporting

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Los Angeles Times

October 5, 2009

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A healthy skeptic perspective on arthritis pain creams, emphasizing, for the most part, "there's no good evidence that any over-the-counter rub or cream offers real relief" according to one source....

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Des Moines Register

September 23, 2009

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A world first: AIDS vaccine cuts the risk of HIV infection by 31 percent in large Thai study

AP Associated Press

September 24, 2009

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Using an appropriately cautious tone, this story effectively informs the reader of the results of the first successful AIDS vaccination trial....

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The Washington Post

September 22, 2009

Rating: ★★★★★

An engaging and important enterprise story that highlights

FIVE STAR STORIES

Scientists Puzzle Over Minor Success Of AIDS Vaccine

The Washington Post

September 25, 2009

Rating: ★★★★★

While many other news organizations were calling an AIDS vaccine trial a breakthrough, this story provides caveats, skepticism, context, comparisons with other vaccines and historical perspective....

Roche Drug Shrinks Tumors in Study

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

September 3, 2009

Rating: ★★★★★

This story reminds readers that its subject is a new drug in early testing and its true efficacy is



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Give your opinions, review our reviews and exchange ideas

PUBLISHER'S NOTE



"It doesn't make sense for us to review TV health news anymore"

Professor Gary Schwitzer
Publisher, HealthNewsReview.org
University of Minnesota health journalism program

Did the story....

- adequately discuss costs?
- avoid disease-mongering?
- evaluate the quality of the evidence?
- quantify harms & benefits - in absolute, not just relative, terms?
- establish the true novelty?
- establish the availability?
- use independent sources & examine conflicts of interest?
- compare the new idea with existing options?
- appear to rely solely or largely on a news release?

media + doctor



australia

media + doctor



canada

media + doctor



hong kong

HEALTH NEWS REVIEW.ORG
Grades for Health News Reporting

Monitor 60 leading news organizations

- n Review only stories that include claims of efficacy or safety in treatments, tests, products or procedures
- n Each story reviewed by 3 reviewers
- n We e-mail the reporter when the review is posted

More than 2,500 stories reviewed

n Australia - 1,410

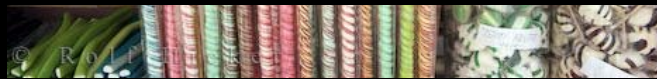
n US - 890

n Canada - 235

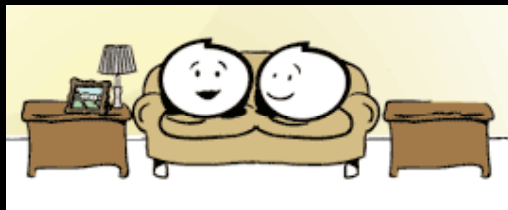
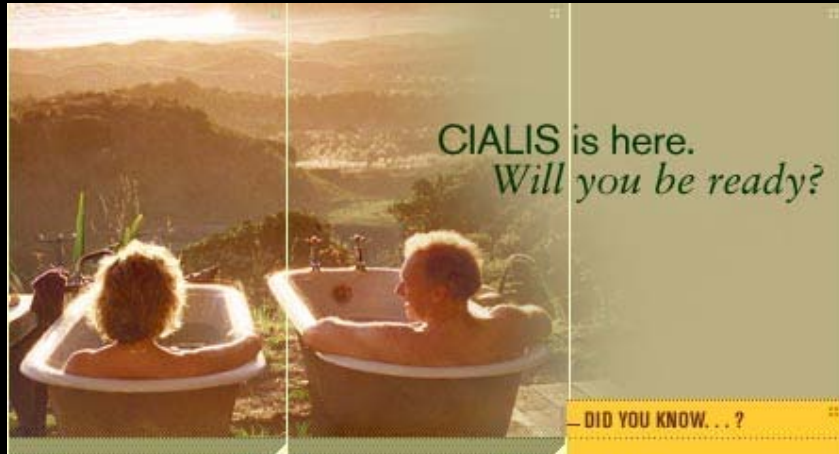
In the US, after 3 years ...

70% of stories fail to:

- n Adequately discuss costs.**
- n Explain how big (or small) is the potential benefit.**
- n Explain how big (or small) is the potential harm.**



- n Everything is terrific
- n Nothing is risky
- n No price tags



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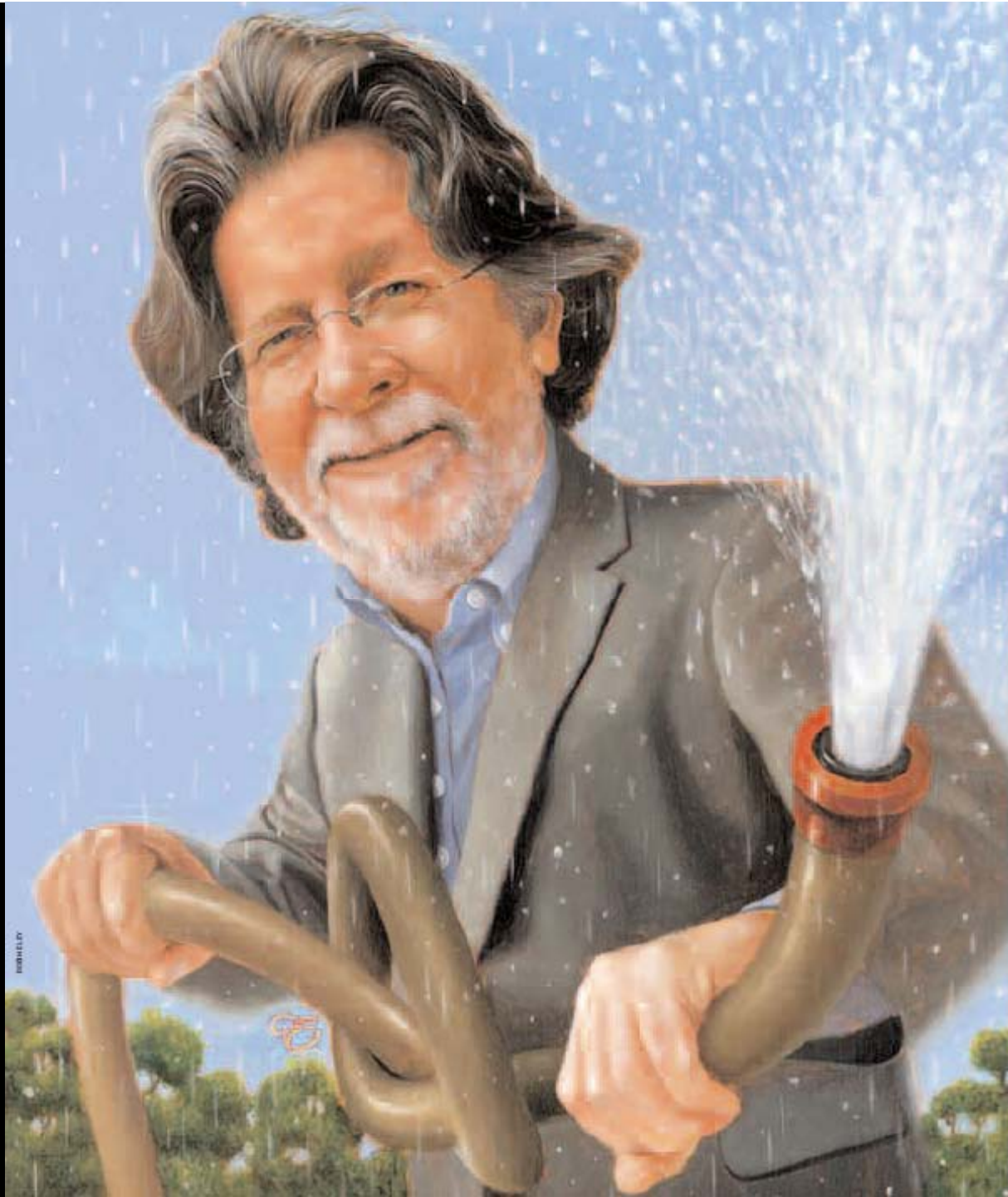
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CUTTING EDGE NAIL CURE
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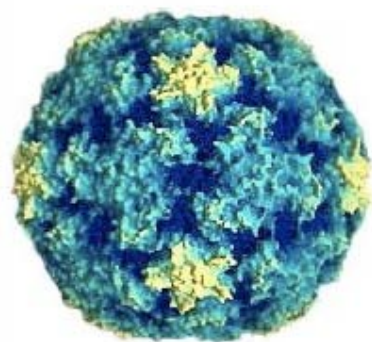
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Plastic surgery could bring relief to millions people who suffer from headaches.
07/31/2009



NEW MIGRAINE CURE?
FOREHEAD LIFT SURGERY HELPS PATIENTS

abc NEWS .com

The Miracle Virus Cure



Pleconaril Could Stop Colds, Flu, Meningitis and More

The Picornavirus causes diseases including the common cold and viral meningitis. Pleconaril, apparently, stops it in its tracks. (ViroPharma)



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ORIGINAL INVESTIGATION

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Prostate Cancer Screening Decisions

Results From the National Survey of Medical Decisions (DECISIONS Study)

EDITORIAL

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Shared Decision Making for Prostate Cancer Screening

Do Patients or Clinicians Have a Choice?

Intuition vs. Science

What we want to be the truth

Vs.

What we know to be the truth

The AMERICAN
SCHOLAR.org

**Science Reporting and
Evidence-Based Journalism**
David Brown

“It is something that both reflects the spirit of the times, the zeitgeist, and can shape it. Good journalism can make public discourse more honest and less oversimplified, more dominated by logical thinking and less dominated by rhetoric. What does science journalism have that makes it a model for good journalism as a whole? The most important thing it has is evidence. In this new world, science reporting – done without exaggeration, and with an eye to giving the reader enough information to make up his own mind – can be a model for intelligent discourse. It can be an exercise in truth-telling and democracy. And what could be better than that? “

Science and journalism are not alien cultures, for all that they can sometimes seem that way. They are built on the same foundation – the belief that conclusions require evidence; that the evidence should be open to everyone; and that everything is subject to question. Both groups are comprised of professional skeptics.”



We try to get journalists to analyze evidence as they report on the high-speed train of expensive and unproven health care technologies that is leaving the station.

Because once it has left the station, it can't be stopped.

...more is not always better

n ...newer is not always better

n ...screening for early disease doesn't
always make sense