

POLICY & PRACTICE

Neurology in the Media

Newspaper coverage of neurologic illness contained errors or exaggerations 20% of the time, researchers from the Mayo Clinic and Arizona State University found. They examined more than 1,200 newspaper articles from 2003 that dealt with any of 11 common neurologic conditions to see if they contained medical errors or stigmatizing language, said the study published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings. Most inaccuracies revolved around neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, and most involved exaggerating symptoms or overstating the treatment effects of new therapies that had been tried only in animal models. The researchers found that 21% of all locally produced stories contained stigmatizing language—defined as “wording that portrays the patient with the neurologic condition as socially undesirable, less desirable, or reduced in personal worth.”

They also noted that conditions with the highest prevalence, such as migraine and head trauma, received the least press coverage. “It would be valuable to determine whether such discrepancies mislead individuals about relative risks of particular illnesses or shape public policy about where medical resources are most needed,” Jessica M. Fisherman, Ph.D., and her colleagues said in an accompanying editorial.

New Multisite Imaging Project

NIH's National Center for Research Resources is providing just over \$24 million over 5 years to the University of California, Irvine to support the Biomedical Informatics Research Network (BIRN), a consortium of 28 universities and 37 research groups. The university is heading up Function BIRN, an effort by 14 network members to develop and test interdisciplinary techniques for integrating efforts in functional magnetic resonance

imaging across multiple sites. “Through this effort, we are creating new models for collaboration among researchers who study diseases at multiple sites with different equipment,” said Dr. Elaine Collier, assistant director of the center's division of clinical research. The knowledge gained “will accelerate scientific discoveries by allowing researchers to tackle complex questions and large-scale research projects that were not previously possible.” More information about the project can be found at www.ncrr.nih.gov/biotech/btbrn.asp.

January. Another 6.4 million were automatically enrolled because they were eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. Close to 6 million already had drug coverage through Medicare Advantage, Medicare's HMO program. The government also counted retirees who receive a drug benefit through their employer or a Medicare retiree subsidy.

—Joyce Frieden

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