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Cancer awareness messages in the UK print media: a pilot mixed methods study

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Introduction: It is not known how national cancer awareness campaign messages are represented in the UK print media.

Aims: Using corpus linguistic methods to identify how cancer is represented in the UK print media and whether it may contribute to inequalities.

Methods: Personal interest stories about women with ovarian cancer were coded for demographic and cancer awareness information. Key words and themes were identified using Log Likelihood scores in WMatrix3 as compared to the British National Corpus Written Sampler.

Results: Of 452 included articles, only a quarter (26.77%, n=121) provided a list of symptoms. Fewer linked early detection and survival (16.81%, n=76) or described the ages most at risk (13.05%, n=59). Coverage decreased with increasing age; only 34.51% (n=156) featured individuals aged over 50. Managers/professionals were featured twice as often as non-professionals (14.82%, n=67 vs 29.3%, n=132). Language use was negative, reflecting sadness (LL=+248.5, n=700) and death (LL=+376.2, n=1109). The battle metaphor was used frequently.

Conclusions: Coverage of ovarian cancer in the UK print media is not representative of those most at risk or of national cancer awareness messages. Ongoing work aims to find out why, based on interviews with press release officers, journalists and editors.

There are no potential conflicts of interest.