Is the BBC truly impartial when reporting on NICE's activities?

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Results

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Introduction

- Early in 2023, there was intense debate on the impartiality at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), with the by-laws stating that "its committed to achieving due impartiality in all its output" and that "this commitment is fundamental to our reputation, our values and the trust of audiences"
- Given the evolving role of NICE as the NHS's "spending watchdog" in British media, this research aims to evaluate whether the BBC is impartial in reporting on NICE's activities.

BBC articles identified

Methods

- BBC News Health articles between 29-JUNE-2022 to 29-JUNE-2023 were identified via Google using the search terms: 'National Institute for Health and Care Excellence' and 'NICE.'
- Statistics on NICE's activities were access from the NICE website.
- Out of the 25 BBC articles identified, 7/25 referred specifically to technology appraisals (tirzepatide for obesity, rimegepant for migraine, semaglutide for obesity x2, olaparib for prostate cancer, pembrolizumab for breast and cervical cancer x2).
- 5/25 referred to medical devices or digital technologies (anxiety and depression apps x2, glucose monitoring and insulin pump system, genetic testing for stroke and deafness prevention). All reflected positive funding decisions.
- The remaining 13 articles directly or indirectly quoted NICE guidelines, most commonly the depression guideline (CG90)referred to three times, followed by ADHD, UTIs, pain, and labour.
- Of the 7 technology appraisals, 1/7 was a negative recommendation and the other 6/7 (86%) were positive recommendations.
- Note, NICE published 94 and 96 technology appraisal guidance in 2021-22 and 2022-23, respectively. 84% of NICE's recommendations were positive (recommended, optimised, or recommended for the CDF).



Conclusions

Despite all the activities being carried out by NICE, only a small proportion have been the subject of a BBC news article. For example, under 10% of NICE health technology assessments were reported on. Nevertheless, the proportion of positive recommendations reported were very similar to NICE's internal statistics (86% vs. 84%) albeit in a much smaller sample.

Abbreviations: ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation; BC: Breast cancer; CC: Cervical cancer; CG: Clinical guideline; NHS: National Health Service; NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; PC: Prostate cancer; UTI: Urinary tract infection

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