

An Analysis of Media Coverage on the Prevention and Early Detection of CKD in Australia

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News media raise public awareness about health and can influence public policy agenda. Recently, nephrologists have sought to make prevention and early detection of chronic kidney disease (CKD) a health care priority. We assessed the extent and manner in which Australian television news and newspapers cover CKD prevention or early detection. Electronic news databases for print media and television programs were searched (May 2005 to March 2007) for items referring to CKD prevention or early detection. We analyzed all relevant items for spokespeople, main news frame, focus of responsibility, proposed solutions, and trigger/reason for publication. Of 2,439 newspaper articles and 10,430 television broadcasts retrieved, only 214 articles (8.77%) and 7 broadcasts (0.06%) were eligible. Kidney transplantation dominated CKD-related news. Lay person or high-profile advocates were virtually absent. Risks of cardiovascular disease and mortality conferred by CKD were not emphasized by news reports; instead, CKD received peripheral mention as a secondary consequence of diabetes or obesity. Few reports cited the economic consequences of CKD. The media focused on lifestyle causes and solutions, whereas nonlifestyle causes and screening and prevention strategies were rarely mentioned. Kidney health professionals need to actively engage with the media in efforts to amplify desired messages on CKD prevention or early detection. Medical journals, research institutions, universities, hospitals, and advocacy groups should issue press releases that highlight newsworthy aspects of this topic. Extending news media coverage can help exert an influence on health policies and agenda setting and increase public awareness to improve prevention and early detection of CKD.

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News media are a major and influential source of health information for the public.^{1,2} Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a worldwide public health problem,³ and recently nephrologists have sought to raise the public health profile of the importance of prevention and early detection of kidney disease.⁴⁻⁶ Raising public awareness of CKD through the media could help accomplish this goal.

For example, evidence about the impact of mass media coverage on behavior change in relation to screening, medicine taking, and treatment preferences⁷⁻¹¹ suggests that media coverage might prompt individuals, particularly those at risk of CKD, to seek health care for early diagnosis and management, both important for preventing disease progression. Also, media coverage could influence public policy agendas for improving kidney health, for example, by influencing the allocation of resources for research and education and providing leverage for legislative and policy change.¹²

Studies have examined how other chronic diseases, including cancer,¹³⁻¹⁷ diabetes,¹⁸⁻²¹ and heart disease,²⁰⁻²² are portrayed in the media. The only study considering media coverage of CKD was limited to a simple content analysis

describing the proportion of television coverage of CKD compared with other health topics, including breast cancer, heart disease, and influenza vaccine, and concluded that CKD receives relatively poor coverage.²³ No study has examined CKD prevention and early detection in television or print news media.

We assessed how Australian television news programs and newspapers cover CKD, focusing particularly on the extent and manner in which news covers prevention and early detection of

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CKD. This information can inform health professionals, kidney health advocates, and researchers about ways to improve advocacy through the media to promote the prevention and early detection of CKD.

METHODS

Search Strategy and Data Extraction

We searched newspaper and television news databases for articles that referred to prevention or early detection of CKD from May 2005 to March 2007. (See Appendix for data on media sources).

Television

Television broadcasts were obtained from a media-monitoring project²⁴ that archives all health-related stories in news, current affairs, and infotainment programs broadcast on all 5 free-to-air channels in Sydney. The database indexes all broadcasts according to health-related categories. All video files of television broadcasts related to kidney disease were provided on DVD.

Newspapers

For print media, we used the online database Factiva to search the 20 major metropolitan and national Australian newspapers for the same period. The keywords kidney, dialysis, renal, and nephrology were entered in Factiva's free text search field, with all irrelevant items retrieved then excluded (eg, "kidney bean"). All newspaper articles were entered into QSR Nvivo 7 (QSR International Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Australia), a software program used to assist with storage, coding, and searching of data.

Two reviewers viewed all television broadcasts and newspaper articles and removed items that made no reference to prevention or early detection of CKD.

Analysis

We coded each included news item and analyzed themes for each of the following questions adapted from previous

work²⁵: (1) Who were the spokespeople? (Persons quoted directly or indirectly who referred to prevention and/or early detection of kidney disease); (2) How was CKD prevention or early detection framed? (Words, phrases, and passages that defined CKD prevention or early detection, proposing to readers and viewers how the issue should be understood); (3) Who was being proposed as responsible for the problem?; (4) Who was suggested should solve the problem and what solutions were proposed?; and (5) Why was the story in the news at this time?

The framework we used to analyze the data can inform how desired messages can be framed so that they might be more useful and relevant to the public audience.

RESULTS

Of 10,430 television news items on all health issues available in the media database broadcast between May 2005 and March 2007, CKD or kidney transplantation was classified as the principal or secondary story in only 43 items (0.004%). Of these, 36 items were excluded from further analysis because prevention or early detection of CKD was not discussed. Our search of newspaper coverage yielded 5,624 articles. Of these, 3,185 were not related to kidney disease and excluded as entirely irrelevant, leaving 2,439 that referred to any aspect of kidney disease. An additional 2,225 of these were excluded because they did not refer to early detection and management, most commonly because they focused on kidney transplantation (Fig 1). Overall, during the 23-month study period, we identified 214 newspapers articles and 7 television broadcasts that referred explicitly to the detection or prevention of CKD (Fig 1). For items included in the study, excerpts from television news and newspa-

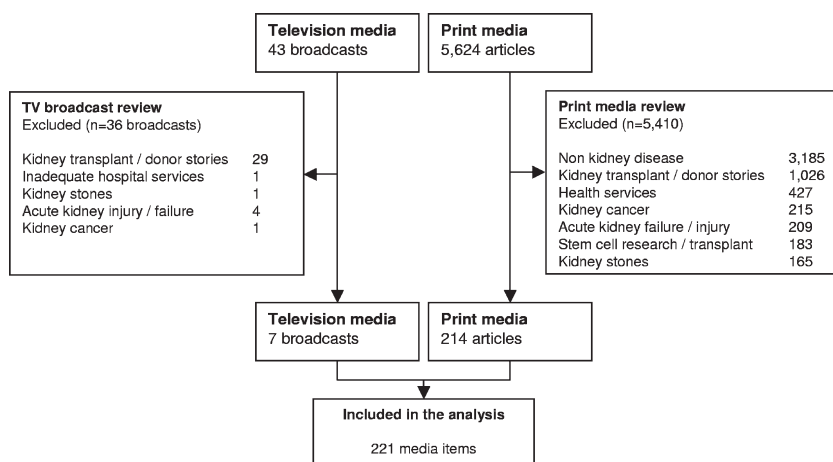


Figure 1. Process of searching and identifying Sydney television (TV) and Australian newspaper source. Articles included in the analysis focus on chronic kidney disease prevention and early detection.

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