



The write stuff

→ Kathy Redmond ■ EDITOR

Cancer has a pretty poor public image. Myths and misconceptions fuel negative attitudes and ignorance about the disease. The media, in turn, can either fuel these misconceptions, or it can challenge them.

Good journalism helps people understand that cancer affects everyone, and that the experience of cancer patients and their chances of surviving with a good quality of life depend heavily on cancer services getting it right, from early detection to rehabilitation and long-term support.

Bad journalism portrays cancer as a virtual death sentence on the one hand, while spreading the false hope of 'wonder drugs' on the other. Talk of 'brave' or 'tragic heroes' denies readers an understanding of the reality of living with a cancer diagnosis while failing to ask pressing questions about what is needed to improve the experience of patients and their families. As a result the general public remains ignorant about cancer, negative attitudes are reinforced and health services are let off the hook.

This issue of *CancerWorld* showcases examples of where journalists and the media have made a positive difference. The stories demonstrate how effective

the media can be in challenging the public's sense of powerlessness in the face of cancer, by raising awareness about how we can bridge gaps and address inequities in access to care, and by conveying important messages: that the quality of cancer care can vary widely, that early diagnosis saves lives, and that life does not stop because you have cancer.

Cancer can be a challenging topic to cover well. Journalists often face problems in accessing clear, up-to-date, accurate information, finding credible sources and resisting the pressure to sensationalise stories to make better headlines. We can help them do a better job by providing the information they need and clarifying the science behind the story. We should acknowledge journalists when they are doing a good job. The European School of Oncology's Best Reporter Award provides one example of how this can be done.

It is probably impossible to get rid of sensationalist media reporting of cancer altogether. However, we should not sit back and accept poor journalism as inevitable. We need to work with the media, to promote critical and intelligent coverage that will improve the public's understanding of what cancer is and what can be done about it.

All correspondence should be sent to the Editor at editor@esoncology.org