

CAN PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS HELP SPAN THE BOUNDARIES  
BETWEEN SCIENTISTS AND JOURNALISTS, AND DOES THIS FUNCTION HELP  
INCREASE ACCURACY OF NEWS ARTICLES ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH?

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**ABSTRACT**

A function of public relations professionals working for public health agencies is to perform a boundary-spanning role, facilitating communication between public health professionals and the news media. The purpose of this research was to examine the role of PR professionals in the communication process, and to determine whether the involvement of a PR professional leads to improved news article accuracy.

This study asked news sources to analyze 167 news articles about state and local health departments to determine, from the news source's perspective, the accuracy of public health news articles, as well as the role of public relations professionals working in state and local health departments. An online survey of sources quoted in articles in major metropolitan newspapers was conducted to examine these issues.

Public relations professionals were involved in 51.5% of the articles included in the survey, with arranging the logistics of the media interview being the most common media relations function. The number of errors in news articles decreased with the involvement of a PR professional. Errors were found in 63.5% of news articles. In this study, phone interviews were the most common method for gathering information for the article, with 77.1% indicating that a phone interview was used.