

# LETTERS

## BAD REPORTING ON HEALTH RESEARCH

# From exaggeration to silence in health related science news and academic press releases: mindful bias?

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There is another side to Sumner and colleagues' evidence on the exaggeration of results in health related science news and academic press releases: the silence surrounding contradictory evidence.<sup>1</sup> A notable case is that of mindfulness meditation. A practice that a few decades ago was hippie is now hip—it has made its way into the NHS, schools, and parliament, and a multitude of scientists are churning out new studies on its health merits.

The positive reports of mindfulness are given wide coverage, but this can't be said for the published contradictory evidence. As an example, where is the academic press release or science news for the most recent—and most rigorous—clinical trial on the effects of mindfulness based cognitive therapy for recurrent depression funded by the Wellcome Trust?<sup>2</sup> Does the silence correlate with the undermining of the technique's benefits? The debate that would have followed its public dissemination is yet to happen, and in the meantime mindfulness keeps its priority status for the treatment of recurrent depression by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.<sup>3</sup>

Goldacre argues that biases in the reporting of science news are not a peripheral matter and suggests ways to make people accountable for how they write about health related research.<sup>4</sup> But how can we deal with the heavy mindful silence surrounding null or negative published results in health research?

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- 1 Sumner P, Vivian-Griffiths S, Boivin J, Williams A, Venetis CA, Davies A, et al. The association between exaggeration in health related science news and academic press releases: retrospective observational study. *BMJ* 2014;349:g7015. (10 December.)
- 2 William M, Crane C, Barnhofer T, Brennan K, Duggan DS, Fennell MJ, et al. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for preventing relapse in recurrent depression: a randomized dismantling trial. *J Consult Clin Psychol* 2013;82:275-86.
- 3 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Depression: the treatment and management of depression in adults (update). (CG90). 2009. <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG90>.
- 4 Goldacre B. Preventing bad reporting on health research. *BMJ* 2014;349:g7465. (10 December.)

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