How Is Organ Transplantation Represented in Quebec Newspapers?

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BACKGROUND

News media (1-4)
- Public source of health information
- Set the agenda for health issues
- Influence behaviours
- Use metaphors to describe or characterize some diseases

News media and organ donation
- In TV shows:
  - Relationship between TV coverage of organ donation, the number of organ transplants performed, and the frequency of discussions about organ donation with families (5)
  - Analysis of American TV entertainment shows has shown that two frameworks are used to portray organ donation: corruption of the powerful and moral integrity of organ donors. (6)
- In newspapers:
  - Organ donation is positively portrayed in 59% of articles. (7)
  - Organ shortage and reassurance regarding the procurement, donation, and transplantation process are the two major themes found in Swiss French newspapers. (8)

No analysis of how organ transplantation (OT) is treated is in the press.

PURPOSE

Analyze coverage of OT in Quebec newspapers.

METHODS

Sampling:
- Techniques pour bibliothèque d'enseignement (Biblio Branche) database
- Articles published between 01-01-1995 and 31-12-2008 in Quebec's daily newspapers
- Key words: organ transplantation, transplant
- 948 articles retrieved, 206 analyzed

RESULTS

Quantitative analysis

Article characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transplant Type</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Evolution of Press Coverage

- 1995: coverage of Mickey Mantle’s liver transplantation
- 1997: controversies surrounding organization of lung transplantation program

DISCUSSION

- Focus on personal experience of transplantation
- Emphasis on transplantation’s successes:
  - Is part of an effort to promote organ donation?
  - Can it create unrealistic expectations for patients waiting for a transplant?
- Uncertainty about the possibility of being transplanted but certainty about and confidence in the successes of transplantation
- Stories on OT in Quebec newspapers follow “media templates” already created for heart transplants: desperation, fatal alternative if no OT, grief and joy . . . (9)
- No media hype surrounding organ transplantation. Is organ transplantation a routine procedure? Is access to organ transplantation a right?
- OT ethical issues raised in newspaper articles are limited to organ shortage, access to transplant waiting lists and organ allocation.
- Silence of newspapers about the limits of transplantation, the quest for immortality and end-of-life care