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## The Image of Polish Medical Institutions in the Media

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A – research concept and design; B – collection and/or assembly of data; C – data analysis and interpretation; D – writing the article; E – critical revision of the article; F – final approval of article; G – other

### Abstract

**Background.** The media have a huge set of different techniques that contribute to shaping public perceptions of reality. These days, there are many lively discussions about the adverse conditions in health care.

**Objectives.** The purpose of this survey was to identify the role of media reports in affecting the public image of health care institutions in Poland.

**Material and Methods.** Graduates and students of several of the biggest universities and colleges in Poland were the target group for the survey. The test group consisted of 1160 people (25% men and 75% women). An anonymous questionnaire consisting of 32 questions was posted on a special website. The data obtained are presented in graphs and tables.

**Results.** Among the survey participants, 16.44% considered media reports a trustworthy source of news about health care system. There was no correlation between participants' assessment of the reliability of the media and their place of residence. In the opinion of 71% of the participants, the manner in which the media present information on health care has an influence on their way of thinking about the health care system. Gender was found to correlate strongly with the assessment of the effect of the media on ways of thinking about health care.

**Conclusions.** The results obtained in this survey imply that media reports play a major role in creating the image of Polish health care institutions. Consequently, cultivating appropriate relations with the media should be a significant part of managing of every health care institution (*Adv Clin Exp Med* 2014, 23, 1, 117–121).

**Key words:** image of the hospital, media relations, cooperation with the media, the media.

The mass media are a permanent and ubiquitous part of everyday life, reporting on the latest events and trends around the world, introducing viewers to new lifestyles and fresh customs. The huge popularity of the mass media has led to detailed research on the strength of their influence and role in modern society.

The mass media have an enormous repertoire of tools and techniques for creating and developing public perceptions of reality [1], and they are generally available to almost everyone. They are now the most important source of news in any contemporary civilization. Naturally, each report has a varying influence on different individuals [2, 3], and for that reason the strength of the mass media should not be exaggerated, but their impact should not be underestimated either.

A dynamic discussion on unfavorable conditions in the Polish health care system is currently going on in the mass media [4]. The public is regularly updated about the growing debt and insolvency of public health care institutions, payroll problems and a lack of funds for health services. Recent media reports have been full of information about the limits for admitting patients being exceeded in many institutions; reductions to the number of admissions, ever-growing lines and extended waiting periods for services; protests and complaints from doctors, new reimbursement regulations and plans to turn health care facilities into businesses, the introduction of additional health insurance and partial charges for treatment. Social anxiety has arisen over fears that patients will be denied access to health care. This ongoing atmosphere of suspense,

concern and anxiety is definitely influenced by the media's negative reports on the Polish health care system [5, 6].

The survey in the present study was aimed at investigating the question of the role and position of the mass media in determining public perceptions of health care facilities in Poland.

## Material and Methods

The survey on the media image of health care institutions in Poland was conducted during November and December of 2010. A survey specifically designed for this study was presented to a sample of 1160 people, predominantly women (75%).

The survey participants were randomly chosen students and graduates of several of the biggest institutions of higher education in Poland: the Medical University of Warsaw, the Medical University of Silesia, Warsaw University, the Warsaw University of Technology, Jagiellonian University, the Medical University of Gdańsk, the National Film School, AGH University of Science and Technology, the Wrocław University of Economics and the Catholic University of Lublin. Current students of these universities represented nearly 91% of the survey group ( $n = 1058$ ); the rest were graduates, who were excluded from the study group.

Among those surveyed, women accounted for 75% and men for 25% of the sample. Among the participants 6% reside in small towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, 10% are residents of cities with 50,000–100,000 inhabitants, 12% live in cities of 100,000–500,000 inhabitants, 16% live in villages and 18% reside in cities with 10,000–50,000 inhabitants. The remaining participants live in cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants (38%).

The research tool was an anonymous questionnaire posted on a website for conducting Internet research ([www.ankietka.pl](http://www.ankietka.pl)). The survey contained 32 various questions. After analyzing the responses, it was found that 100% of the submitted questionnaires were filled out properly.

The survey concentrated on issues related to the media image of Polish health care institutions: the participants' interest in news about the condition of the health care system, their degree of awareness about current medical issues and the participants' sources for news about the health care system. The questionnaire also investigated questions like the participants' assessment of the time the mass media focus on information about Polish health care, the image of health care created by the mass media, and the news topics the participants most often see in the media, as well as the topics they most often actively seek news about. The

participants were also asked about the trustworthiness of the mass media as a basis of information about Polish health care, their opinion of the media image of Polish hospitals and the impact of the mass media on their assessment and viewpoint regarding medical care in Poland.

The results were then submitted to statistical analysis using Statistica software (licensed by the Medical University of Warsaw, Poland).

## Results

Asked to select up to 3 of their main sources of news about medical care, more than 71% of the survey respondents chose the Internet, and 65% of them chose television. For almost 1/3 of the participants (32%), doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals are among the main sources of information. The press is a main source for 35%; their families are a main source for 28%; and the radio is a main source for 20%. For 19% of the respondents listed friends or neighbors as a main source of health care news, while 12% indicated symposia, conferences, scientific meetings, seminars and professional training. Posters, leaflets, brochures, pamphlets are a source of information for 12% of the study participants, and professional periodicals are a source for 11% (Fig. 1).

The majority of the participants in the study (68%) felt that the image of health care presented in the mass media is negative. About 17% of them feel the media image of medical care is presented objectively, and only slightly more than 1% of those surveyed consider it positive. Among the respondents 14% did not have an opinion on this subject (Fig. 2).

Fig. 3 illustrates that for 44% of the respondents the mass media are not a trustworthy source of news regarding the Polish health care system. Only 16% of the participants replied in the positive, while over 40% of the study group did not have an opinion on this subject.

The analysis of the responses also established that the size of a participant's place of residence has no significant impact on their judgment of the reliability of the mass media as a source of information about the medical system ( $p > 0.05$  – Table 1).

The results shown in the table indicate that 635 people answered yes or no; the rest of the participants (423) chose the answer "hard to say". The total number of respondents in the study was 1058.

The majority of the respondents (73%) have a negative opinion of the media image of Polish health care institutions. One quarter of the respondents did not have an opinion on this question. Only 2% of the people surveyed have a positive

### Where do you get most of your information on the health care system?

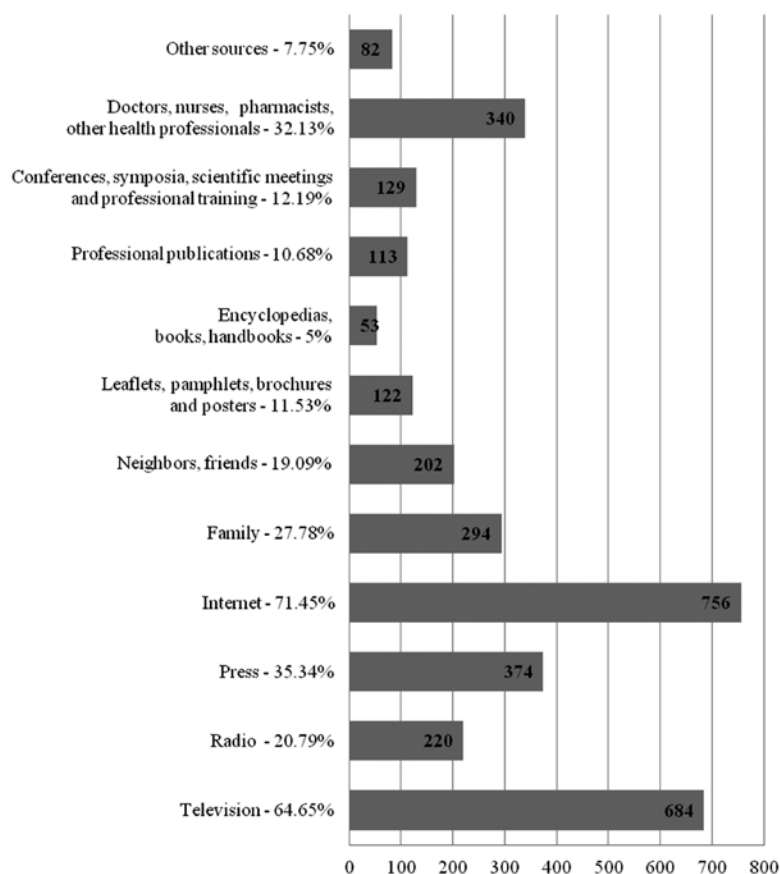


Fig. 1. Sources of information on the health care system (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

### What image of the health care system do the media present?

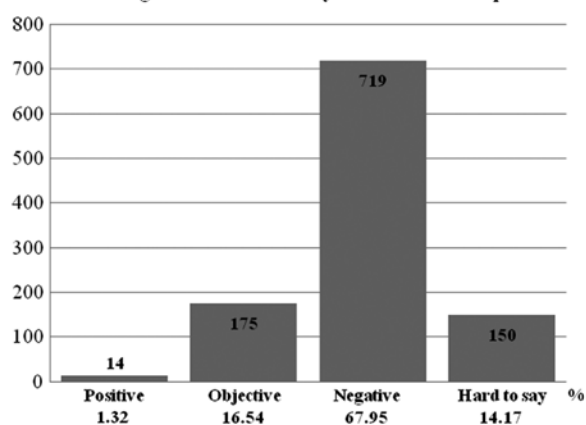


Fig. 2. The image of health service presented in the media (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

### Do you consider the media a reliable source of information about the health care system?

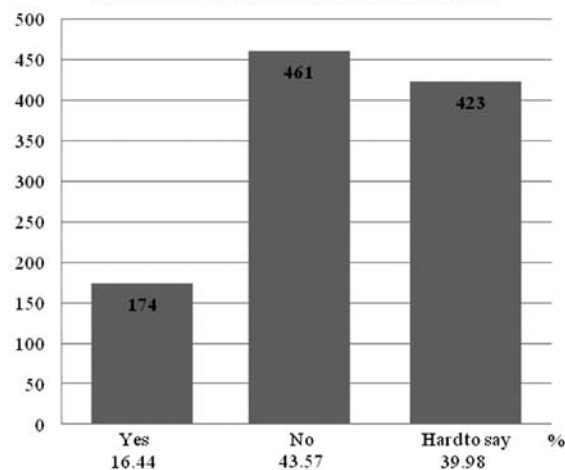


Fig. 3. The media as a reliable source of information about the health care system (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

opinion of the media's image of health care facilities in Poland (Fig. 4).

According to 71% of the participants in the survey, the way the mass media present news about medical care has an influence on their attitude toward and assessment of the health care system (Fig. 5). One fifth of the respondents believe that the mass media do not shape their opinions about and attitudes toward the health care system,

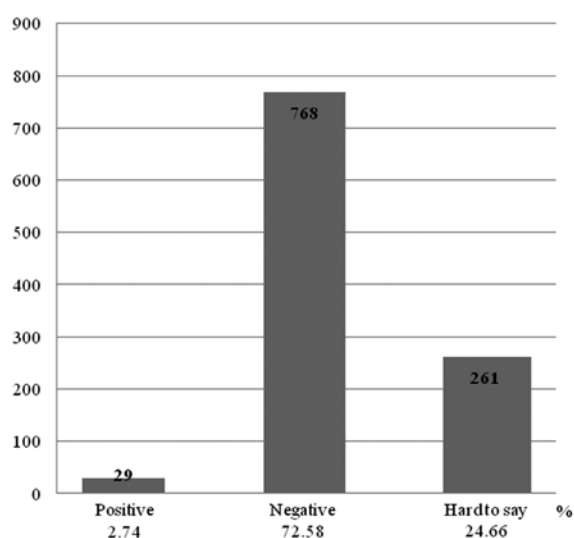
while 9% of the participants have no opinion on this question.

Table 2 shows that there was a correlation between the participants' gender and their assessment of the impact of the mass media on their attitudes towards the medical system. Women were considerably more likely than men to believe that

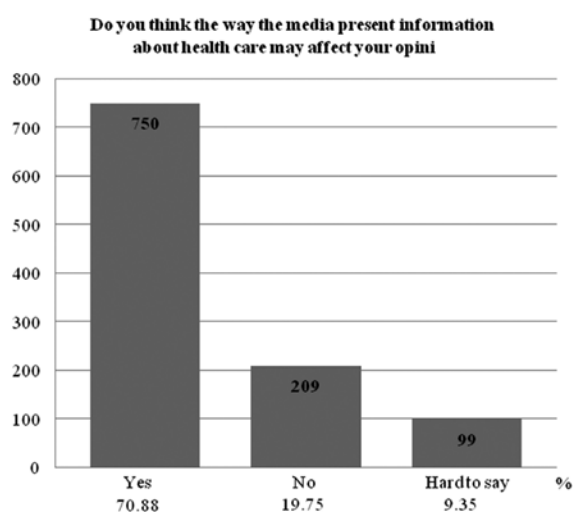
**Table 1.** The participants' place of residence and their assessment of the credibility of the media as a source of information on the health care system (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

Are the media a reliable source of information about the health care system?		Village	Small town up to 10 k inhabitants	Town with 10–50 k inhabitants	City with 50–100 k inhabitants	City with 100–500 k inhabitants	City over 500 k inhabitants	Total
Yes	Number	24	11	31	18	25	65	174
	%	23.3	32.4	27	29	34.2	26.2	27.4
No	Number	79	23	84	44	48	183	461
	%	76.7	67.6	73	71	65.8	73.8	72.6
Total	Number	103	34	115	62	73	248	635
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**How do you assess the media image of health care facilities in Poland?**



**Fig. 4.** Evaluation of the media image of health care facilities in Poland (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)



**Fig. 5.** The influence of media presentation of news about health care on opinions and attitudes toward the health care system (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

**Table 2.** Gender and the participants' assessment the influence of information presented in the media on their attitudes toward the health care system (n = 1058), (p > 0.05)

Do you think the way the media present information about health care may affect your opinion?		Women	Men	Total
Yes	Number	579	171	750
	% of given gender	72.8	65	70.9
No	Number	139	70	209
	% of given gender	17.5	26.6	19.8
Hard to say	Number	77	22	99
	% of given gender	9.7	8.4	9.4
Total	Number	795	263	1058
	% of given gender	100	100	100

the information presented in the mass media affect their attitudes toward the health care system in Poland (p < 0.05).

## Discussion

A patient's individual experiences play a fundamental role in their assessment of health care institutions. Satisfied patients exhibit an increased level of loyalty to the hospitals where they were treated, and this has a particularly strong impact on its reputation in the community. The Mayo Clinic is one of the biggest medical centers in the United States, and it enjoys a very positive reputation among the public. About 520,000 patients are treated there annually, of whom 90% are satisfied with the therapy provided, which means 470,000

positively-impressed patients. According to estimates by experts from this hospital, the average patient shares information and opinions about the treatment with 39 people. If this number is multiplied by the number of positive opinions, the result is 18 m community members who have encountered a positive opinion of the Mayo Clinic [7].

However, people sometimes modify their opinions and beliefs about health care institutions on the basis of news presented in the media. Information presented in the media is highly selective, and not always consistent with the actual facts, course of events, or their causes and effects [3].

The authors concluded that the results obtained in this study indicate that the mass media play an important role in creating the image of health care institutions in Poland. The strength of the influence of the mass media on people's perceptions of health care institutions is very varied and connected with many different factors.

The authors have observed that news presented in the mass media is by nature simplified, conventionalized, often one-sided and not devoid of the journalist's personal point of view. Time constraints mean the mass media are not able to convey the full details. In the opinion of 67.95% of the respondents to the survey in this study, the media create a negative image of health care institutions. Only 16.54% of the respondents said that the image is objective.

Given the above, cultivating good media relations should be a major part of the activities of every health care institution. However, it is very important to realize that media relations are not achieved only through press releases. It consists in arduously building databases and networking with individual editorial teams, organizing events that are really attractive from the media's standpoint, researching and creating noteworthy news items and disseminating them in an appropriate form.

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