



Putting Media in the Health Care Picture

Seminar on health care reform for journalists

SUMMARY

American Health Line, a daily electronic newsletter in Falls Church, Va., which focuses on health policy, hosted and moderated a one-day media seminar on February 2, 1994.

The primary goal of the seminar was to better equipping the media to track and interpret the health care reform debate for the public.

Key Results

- The seminar brought government representatives and health care and public opinion experts together with members of the media to increase the capacity of the media to understand and report on health care reform proposals.

The seminar provided participants with insights into the links between the political process and possible health care reforms.

Project staff divided the seminar into two sessions.

- The first session focused on the lessons learned from past social reform movements. By focusing on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and the Catastrophic Health Care Insurance Act, participants saw how the politics surrounding these issues might foreshadow the current health care reform debate.
- The second session provided a forum for discussion of the legislative impact on health care. Panelists emphasized the effects of proposed legislation on the general public.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) partially funding the seminar with a grant of \$5,437 from November 1993 to June 1996.

THE PROJECT

At the time this contract was made, both political parties agreed on the need for health care reform. All parties involved in the health care reform debate assumed that the details

for shaping reform would be subjected to political pressures similar to those which shaped other social policies.

The media would play a critical role in the process as the public receives the majority of its policy information from television and newspapers. Therefore, educating members of the media about the political process and its impact on health care reform would be important.

American Health Line (AHL), a daily electronic newsletter focusing on health policy, hosted and moderated a one-day media seminar on February 2, 1994, with the primary goal of better equipping the media to track and interpret the health care reform debate for the public.

The seminar brought government representatives and health care and public opinion experts together with members of the media to increase the capacity of the media to understand and report on health care reform proposals. Information regarding the number of attendees, names and positions of presenters, and organizations represented by both groups was unavailable.

AHL established three objectives for the "Seminar on Health Care Reform for Journalists." First, the seminar was intended to broaden and deepen the capacity of the media to accurately report on health care reform.

AHL did not intend for this forum to generate direct media coverage. Rather, AHL hoped panel-led discussions would create a forum for thoughtful dialogue concerning how best to evaluate and cover proposed health care reforms in the media.

The second objective AHL established for the seminar was to increase the familiarity of the political press corps with health care issues. AHL perceived a lack of in-depth knowledge among this cohort regarding the possible outcomes various pieces of health legislation elicited.

By inviting members of the popular media, public opinion and health care experts, and government representatives, AHL created a diversity of participants capable of learning from the experiences of the other groups.

The media learned of the impacts specific pieces of legislation would have regarding the rate of health insurance coverage for children, for instance. Health care experts determined where and how members of the media typically received their information on health care issues.

Finally, AHL created a nonpartisan forum that emphasized most the areas with unilateral political support. In doing so, AHL created a rewarding forum for discussion, even when the late cancellation of a key speaker threatened the political balance of one of AHL's

panels. By eliminating political bias, AHL created a context in which the media better understood the possible outcomes of health policies.

Hence, this forum encouraged journalists to look beyond the politically biased, day-to-day bickering of opponents, to how the policy would impact the way people receive health care.

In order to achieve these objectives, AHL divided the seminar into two sessions. The first session focused on the lessons learned from past social reform movements. By focusing on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and the Catastrophic Health Care Insurance Act, participants saw how the politics surrounding these issues might foreshadow the current health care reform debate.

The second session provided a forum for discussion of the legislative impact on health care. Panelists emphasized the effects of proposed legislation on the general public.

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