Abstract Lausanne Jana Declercq

‘(De)constructing Health News’ is a transdisciplinary project of the Health, Media & Society research centre (Ghent University), aiming at investigating the processes and stakeholder interaction involved in the (de)construction of elderly-related health news in Belgium. Today, laypeople are overwhelmed with health-related news and information, and they often have difficulties processing it all (Andreassen et al., 2010); meanwhile, the aging of the population drastically changes the demographic landscape and makes health care costs surge. To examine the societal background, processes and impact of these issues, four PhD researchers are working on four work packages, i.e.:

(1) Stakeholder analysis; mapping the political-economic and institutional relations between different actors involved, like pharmaceutical companies, health insurance companies, journalists, researchers, doctors, patients, etcetera.

(2) Lifecycle analysis of elderly-related health news stories in press releases, newspapers and online weblogs; by taking a multi-sited, linguistic ethnographic perspective, the complex discursive processes and professional routines at work will be examined.

(3) Quantitative analysis of the output of the news production, by scrutinizing news sourcing, and conducting a frame and discourse analysis on elderly-related health news content.

(4) Qualitative audience research; to gain understanding of uptake, perception, interpretation of elderly-related health news.

As a PhD student focusing on the second work package, my research sets out to answer how and why elderly-related health news stories are selected by journalists, how news stories travel back and forth between stakeholders, and to map the lifecycle of news that is initiated by PR-offices. Are these news stories reproduced more or less verbatim by the news media, or do journalists make critical inquiries into the facts they are provided with and recontextualize these (Catenaccio et al., 2011)? The linguistic ethnographic fieldwork will show which of these two scenarios occur most often in journalistic practice, and which factors influence the processes and decisions involved.

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