



newsletter

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www.project-heart.eu

## Brief description of the project

The European co-funded project HearT aims to develop **vocational training on health reporting for journalists**. This is a 2-year Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Dissemination project co-funded by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, officially launched in November 2010.



Lifelong Learning Programme

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## Overview of results

### • Health reporting courses in the EU

#### HearT research on health reporting training in Europe

The HearT consortium was able to identify **77 seminars and courses** focusing on health reporting and health journalism. In relation to other fields of studies and academic research in Europe, this number is extremely low. More than 11.000 courses on market economics are being taught at universities in Europe each semester – compared to the 77 courses on health journalism identified in university curricula in Europe during 2006 and 2011. Research was undertaken in spring 2011 in a total of 39 countries, including all EU member states and third countries.

#### Small number of tertiary full-time study programs on health journalism in Europe

Despite the low number of findings on full-time study courses on health journalism or health reporting for the target group of journalists and media professionals, distinctive tertiary education and training programs, as BA and MA level study programs, were found in **Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Spain** and the **UK**. Most courses have duration of 4 to 6 semesters. Curricula start with introduction on journalism, forms of journalism, media and journalistic work methods, introduction to print, electronic (TV and radio) and online journalism and offer selected seminars on health reporting as a form of specialized journalism.

**Two graduate study programs**, one in **Germany** and one in the **UK**, offer a **diploma on Medical Journalism**. The study programs offer both journalistic training, research on specialized topics and coverage of selected elements, such as health systems, medical business, public health and the role of pharmaceutical companies within the health system.

#### Short-term training seminars for journalists

The majority of findings were **one or two-day study courses** offered either by universities or professional organizations (journalists' associations), and (in Switzerland) pharmaceutical companies. Target groups of these courses are professional journalists. Courses were found on ethical issues, preventive health, management of health crises in the media, special health issues, such as prevention of AIDS/HIV or treatment of diabetes and on new treatments and medicine.

HearT website offers a comprehensive databank with all courses and seminars identified at [www.project-heart.eu/index.php/projectheart/datamainviewpost](http://www.project-heart.eu/index.php/projectheart/datamainviewpost)



### • Journalist's survey

Striking results that reveal **training gaps** on health journalism were drawn from the original survey that was conducted in the framework of the Work Package (WP) 2 "Reporting Health in Europe" of the HearT project. In the survey participated **176 working journalists** in the partner countries, namely Estonia (20), Finland (25), Germany (28), Greece (23), Romania (20), Spain (27) and the United Kingdom (33). The aim of the survey was to assess journalists' training and identify their needs concerning health reporting.

The majority of journalists participating in the survey were female and of middle age. Most of them were experienced journalists, working for more than 11 years, while most of them worked for more than 6 years specifically on health reporting. According to the survey, only a **small proportion of journalists** (33.5%) has received **specialized training** on reporting health topics in the past. A rather interesting and crucial result is that participants who have received such training (such as journalists from Romania and Spain), consider it more necessary than those from other countries. In addition, journalists focusing on medical research and science consider specialized training more necessary than their counterparts.

Asked to identify their needs in further specialized training, journalists believe they need to acquire specific skills related to:

- evaluating conflicts of interest
- interpreting medical research reports and
- understanding statistics.

These skills are required mainly to analyze health topics related to medical research and science, health policy issues and business/economics of health care.

Moreover, the majority of journalists preferred **training through national conferences or workshops**, lasting one to two days, in which online material, printed books and resource guides should be provided.

The survey, also, assessed the most important obstacles and problems journalists encounter when reporting on health topics. The points below were identified as the main obstacles:

- Few people in the health system (i.e. doctors, experts etc.) are willing to provide information or talk to the media.
- There is excessive bureaucracy and limited cooperation with the health authorities.
- Health topics are largely influenced by companies or lobbies of the medical sector, while it is difficult to distinguish between promotional material and the real merits of the story.
- There are always time constraints.
- There is lack of statistical data and updated national statistics, as well as difficulties on interpreting statistics and, in general, lack of medical education.

Finally, concerning the perceptions of journalists regarding the existing coverage of health issues, 80.2% of them consider it as fair or good, while only 5.8% consider it as excellent. The less covered health stories are considered those of global health, business/economics of health care and health disparities. Only consumer/lifestyle health stories seem to be adequately covered in all countries. Comparatively lower quality of coverage is observed in health disparities, medical research and science and health care quality and performance.

The important findings of this survey are being used in the framework of the HearT project, to develop educational material and modules.

## Training Programme

As an outcome of the HearT European research efforts, to identify health reporting related courses and to explore the needs of health reporters, a specialized training program is being developed. The innovative training package will consist of:

- 17 educational modules that include both the topics and skills journalists reported that they need further training on
- training events, such as workshops or seminars, in all partner countries
- on-line tools

Since differences in the interest and need for training appear to exist among countries, the training package that will be pilot tested in each country will be tailored based on the country's specific needs and possibly include different combination of modules.

### Modules

Based on the aforementioned findings the following topics and skills have been selected to be developed as training modules:

Topics/ Skills
Medical Research and Science
The Business/Economics of Health Care
Health Policy
Health Care Quality and Performance
Global Health
Consumer/Lifestyle Health
The Politics of Health Care (Public Health)
Health Disparities
The Workings of Publicly Financed Health Programs
How to Evaluate Conflicts of Interest
How to Interpret Medical Research Reports & How to Understand Statistics
How to Do Multimedia Reporting
How to Understand Hospital & Other Financial Reports

### Training Events

According to the findings of the survey each country will seek to develop a flexible use of the training materials outlined above, to reach the maximum possible audience of interested journalists. Therefore each partner will select specific modules as well as customize the training events in terms of duration and implementation. Training equivalent to a 4-day workshop will be delivered in all participating countries, organized according to journalists' preferences, varying from 2-hour workshop sessions up to two or even more days of training.

The target group of the training events will be:

- Health journalists and health reporters or editors who want to advance their skills
- Journalists and students in general who want to develop basic skills on health reporting

### Online Resources

Training material will also be available through the project's website in different languages. Publicly-available resources (in English where necessary, or national versions where appropriate versions are available) will be also posted online.

## News

### "Health in the Headlines" Conference

The first European conference on health journalism titled "Health in the Headlines", organized by Coventry University, took place on 23-24 June 2011, in Coventry.

Professional journalists, representatives from professional organizations, educators, academics from Universities across Europe were gathered to discuss and debate several issues regarding health journalism. Participants had the unique opportunity to exchange ideas with academics and media experts from Europe and the U.S. such as the president of the Association of Health Care Journalists and the Medical Journalists Association, the former health editor of the Guardian, the publisher of the award-winning website HealthNewsReview.org, the executive editor of Reuters Health, and draw valuable lessons regarding the coverage of health issues.

The HearT project was among the key presentations of the conference.

### HearT partners meeting in Madrid

The 3<sup>rd</sup> partners meeting took place in Madrid, on 19-20 November 2011. The meeting was hosted by ANIS (Asociación Nacional de Informadores de la Salud), the new member of the project consortium, that replaced the University of Minho. Researchers from the partner organizations as well as an invited expert, Mrs Trudy Lieberman, Fulbright Fellow and Member of the Association of Health Care Journalists, participated in the meeting. The basic aim was the finalization of the training methodology and the design and content of the training program.



## Forthcoming meetings & events

- **4<sup>th</sup> Partners' meeting in Bucharest**  
30, 31 March, 1 April
- **EU Conference & Project's final meeting in Athens**  
October 2012

## HearT Partnership

The HearT partnership comprises of **7 Partners** from **7 countries**. A consortium of institutions and organizations from the medical and communication fields was created to fulfill in the best way the HearT's aims and objectives.

### Main Partner:

- Institute of Preventive Medicine, Environmental and Occupational Health, Prolepsis - Greece

### Associated Partners:

- Coventry University - United Kingdom
- University of Tartu - Estonia
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health - Finland
- University of Applied Sciences Dusseldorf - Germany
- Center for Independent Journalism - Romania
- Asociacion Nacional de Informadores de la Salud - Spain

