

Workshop on Responsible Communication of Basic Biomedical Research: Enhancing Awareness and Avoiding Hype

Executive Summary

From grant applications and journal articles to press releases and news stories, reports of scientific advances can oversell or misrepresent the findings. To explore the effects of this hype on the scientific enterprise and public trust, a workshop was organized by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and hosted by NIH's National Institute of General Medical Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, on June 22, 2017.

The meeting brought together a diverse group of experts who communicate about basic biomedical research: scientists, including those who study communications; academic and corporate communications officers; policy advisors; and journalists. Participants discussed the problems of hyped research as well as the difficulties of communicating in today's media landscape, motivations for certain forms of science communications, the inherent features of science that make communicating about it challenging, and the role of press releases in promoting research progress. Although the panelists focused on basic biomedical research, their discussions and suggestions were relevant to science communicators working in other fields. Their recommendations included:

- Provide communications training to scientists throughout their careers, and develop toolkits to help them further hone those skills.
- Change the incentives of communication, focusing more on the scientific process and less on a single research study.
- Embrace and help others understand the uncertainty in science.
- Develop and follow a logic model to outline both long-term and short-term communication goals, and then establish the best tactics.
- Tell a good story that conveys researchers' excitement about the discovery process and harnesses the audience's sense of curiosity.
- Use metaphor, imagery, and illustrations to explain complex concepts or techniques.
- Make use of the full range of communication platforms to reach different audiences, from YouTube and Instagram to Twitter, blogs, and online whiteboards.
- Rather than issuing press releases on a single finding and pitching new results, share leads on work in development and scientists who can comment on stories in the news.
- Consider which news outlet, including local and niche ones, can best reach the intended audience.

For more details, see the [workshop agenda](#), [extended summary](#), and [archived videocast](#).