

Research has emphasized the pivotal role of a 'healthy' doctor-patient relationship in patient safety. This relationship has become less trusting and both parties have become more suspicious of the other. There is a widening gap between doctors and patients due to asymmetry in knowledge, socioeconomic status and educational levels. But, the reports of medical errors in the media have also contributed to this polarization and these misperceptions.

This study aims at analysing the presented media content on medical errors and adverse events. Suggestions will be made on the possible implications for health care. The analysis exists of three parts: a content analysis (CA) on newspaper articles, a CA on television news and a CA on all television (TV) content (fictional and non-fictional programs).

For the first CA the Mediargus archive is used. This archive contains all newspaper articles from 1998 till today and this for the 8 largest newspapers in Flanders, Belgium. For the analysis of TV news, the ENA (Electronic News Archive) is used. This archive contains all news items from 2003 till 2008 from the two Flemish channels that broadcast news. The third sample in this study exists of 430 hours of TV programming. This TV content was recorded in March 2005. Hours were sampled from a four week period to represent a typical week. The CA focuses on the type of medical error, the demographics of the actor, the demographics of the patient, the consequence for the patient and the solution interventions from hospitals or other organisations involved.

Results suggest a rise in media attention for medical errors. Not only the number but also the importance of the items on medical errors has grown. The discussion focuses at the consequences for health professionals and health care of this grown media attention from a cultivation point of view.