Journalists urged to collaborate with health workers

By Maame Agyeiwaa Agyei

4 Oct 2012

The rector of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), David Newton has entreated health reporters to establish a cordial relationship with health workers, as a means of gathering accurate information for their reports.

He said the collaboration between health reporters and health workers would create a platform for journalists to call on health professionals for first hand information concerning health issues.

This, according to him, would prevent the journalist from relying solely on secondary sources of information, especially the internet, which might not necessarily be reliable or provide accurate information.

He explained that such knowledge would further equip health reporters to write authoritatively on subjects of health, help find solutions to health problems, and advocate for critical health issues for the benefit of the public.

Newton was addressing health reporters at a forum, as part of a media project, dubbed -"Building Bridges: The Health Professionals and Journalists Media Resource Project" in Accra on Wednesday, 3 October 2012.

He said the project was aimed at measuring the expectations and experiences of twenty senior editors and reporters on health reporting in Ghana over the next eighteen months.

He noted that "the days where journalists toil for information on health is gone," therefore, the findings from the forum would be used to develop a curriculum for the training of thirty journalists and thirty health workers. This would help enhance the relationship between health professionals and journalists.

He further noted that such collaboration would reduce the burden of research that most journalists deal with, saying, "it is a good idea that the health professionals are willing to give information to reduce the burden of journalists."

He added that as part of the program, a database has been created to enable journalists communicate effectively and report more on health stories.

The GIJ rector said the programmes developed out of the project would be incorporated into the institution's curriculum to allow students, especially those in the field of humanities, to specialize in health reporting.

In an address read on behalf of the president of the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA), the treasurer of GJA, Linda Asante Agyei said health reporting has not been encouraging because of inadequate access to information from health

professionals.

This, she said, often discouraged journalists from specializing in health reporting. She, however, expressed the hope that "this collaboration will help sustain the few reporters left and will make health reporting attractive to journalists in the future."

According to her, health reporting was already a difficult task, and it becomes extremely difficult when health professionals refuse to assist journalists with accurate information.

According to her, the reluctance of health professionals to provide journalists with needed information was due to a lack of trust in journalists but "now that the gap has been bridged, we hope they work as bed fellows to give service to the people of Ghana."

Agyei pleaded with government and other stakeholders to support health reporting in Ghana to enable the journalists compete with their counterparts all over the world.

A public health specialist, Dr. George Mensah was enthusiastic that the collaboration would go a long way to help both parties share accurate information for the benefit of the general public.

He was hopeful that with a better collaboration between journalists and health workers, the former group would seek expert knowledge before using video coverage/pictures of medical issues, particularly of fatal accidents.

He called on health reporters to often take advantage of capacity building programmes because it would equip them to write evidence based reports, and not report research findings out of context.

Source: allAfrica

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