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Information under control: medical news in France between the early 1950s and early 1980s

Dominique Marchetti

Abstract

This article offers an analysis of the process of construction of scientific sections in the French generalist media between the beginning of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1980s. Using the specific case of medicine, it shows that this type of information occupied a singular position because it was relatively well-controlled by medical institutions with the collaboration of a small group of specialised journalists. The historic comparison emphasises the fact that the news coverage of medicine was more consensual than today because the scientific discourse was not controversial.

Introduction

In France, there are numerous works on the dissemination of science, particularly on its popularisation (see, for example, Jacobi & Schiele, 1988; Roqueplo, 1974), media discourse in this field (Babou, 2004; Babou & Le Marec, 2003; 2006; Fouquier & Veron, 1985) and, more broadly, the relationship between science and media (*Communication et langages*, 2001; Flaysakier, 1997). Yet few in France have studied the collective history of news producers and/or conditions for the production of scientific news (Bensaude-Vincent & Rasmussen, 1997; Boltanski & Maldidier, 1969; Paillart, 2005; Tristani-Potteaux, 1997). The same applies to publications in English, with a few exceptions such as the seminal research carried out by Dorothy Nelkin (1987). Work on health or medical news is even more lacking.

This paper focuses on the development of the field of science news reporting in France, particularly medical news reporting, in print and television, from the early 1950s to the 1980s¹. The aim is to show how and why health information was disseminated as a “separate” part of media production, in the sense that it was relatively well controlled by medical authorities in collaboration with a small group of specialised journalists. The period from post-war times to the 1970s is contrasted with both the second half of the 19th century, which is often described as a “golden age” of public communication of science (Bensaude-Vincent & Rasmussen, 1997), and the contemporary period (since the 1980s). The relations between journalistic and medical (and more broadly scientific) fields are now more strongly mediated by political, economic or moral

stakes, or even by the real or supposed expectations of “public opinion” (Briggs & Hallin, 2016; Marchetti, 2010)².

Science and medicine began to be the subject of articles in the widely circulated French press in the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Béguet, 1990; Bensaude-Vincent & Rasmussen, 1997; Sheets-Pyenson, 1985). The word “popularisation” and the specialised press appeared at that time. However, unlike in the United States (Felt, 1997, p. 254)³, France did not have a highly structured environment for medical and science reporting; it had neither a news agency nor specialised journalists or columnists. It was not until the 1950s that journalism specialising in science and technology was constituted under a new heading. The main approach used here is to consider this object as a field (Benson & Neveu, 2005; Bourdieu, 1999). The concept of field makes it possible to show what constitutes the unity and the diversity of the journalistic field but also, and especially, to study it in relational terms. Journalistic productions cannot be fully understood without seeing at the same time how this field of relations is structured at different levels, since it is itself composed of sub-spaces that operate according to differently differentiated logics, and what relations it maintains with the universes in which it reports on activities (in this case scientific and medical fields).

The issues of mediatisation

The history of scientific and medical news essentially covers the struggle to control its publicity, especially by the media. The problem of its dissemination to the general public arose all the more strongly in the aftermath of World War II when media reporting was in full swing. Public policies were in place in this area (Boy, 1999) and advances in science, especially medical science, were very important: for example, penicillin diffusion, brain surgery, the first transplants and the polio vaccine.

To justify a right of scrutiny over scientific activities, journalists often invoked “public interest” and argued that research had implications for everyday life. It was often this aspect that was privileged in the popularisation of this field of activity and constituted one of its forces (Cloître & Shinn, 1986). Another argument was that “scientists” could not “live confined to a reserved domain”, according to a text by the Association of Journalists of Scientific Information (Roqueplo, 1974, p. 45): they must be accountable because they were “paid by the public” (Bourget, 1985, p. 51).

The journalistic field then appeared as a weakly autonomous universe with regard to the medical space, which had a professional order and was strongly dominated by the “big bosses”. Indeed, as shown by Luc Boltanski and Pascale Maldidier (1969, p. 10; 1971, p. 101), the esoteric work of researchers and faculty was at the time relatively limited to the professors of the most consecrated faculties. Institutions controlled access to public speech and journalists targeted only those scholars seen as the most legitimate.

While the journalistic and scientific spaces may share the same view of a neutral and objective truth, they diverge strongly according to their logics (Dunwoody & Ryan, 1985; Labasse, 1999, pp. 23-31). For scientists, the media space is not an appropriate forum for discussion, as opposed to scholarly journals which are controlled by reading committees who determine the distribution of scientific articles. The stereotype of the journalist who seeks only “sensationalism” is prevalent in France and the US. In addition, the French scientific authorities have watched their interlocutor journalists patronised and distrusted, as summarised with humour by a science journalist who has specialised in this area since 1950⁴: “What do these guys come up with? They do not know anything about it ... They do not have to divulge, if I may say so, our manufacturing secrets!” (J2). Until the 1950s, media were often used only to convey highly controlled health education messages (Pinell, 1992, pp. 270-271). Dissemination of medical research was even judged by

many researchers in the 1960s to be “unnecessary or even harmful”, particularly by biological researchers (Boltanski & Malidier, 1969, p. 54). But for others, as Jean-Louis Crémieux, Deputy Secretary-General of the Committee for the Expansion of Scientific Research, said in 1958 (cited by Schiele, 2005, p. 15): “Dissemination makes it easier to attract the researchers and scientists we need.”

The rise of popular press and radio, and then of television from the 1960s, accentuated antagonisms. The problem of information in this field was regularly debated in the representative professional institutions (Ordre des médecins, Chambre syndicale, journalists’ associations, and so on). Medical professionals wanted to control (or even prohibit in some cases) the dissemination of medical information, especially because they feared that doctors would intervene in the press to derive an advertising benefit. They were also concerned about the perverse effects that newspaper articles and reports could have on the population: “premature” information, for example, could give rise to unfounded hopes or disappointments; other information might encourage self-medication or the use of “doctors” not recognised by the professional order.

Physicians’ representatives sought to preserve their autonomy from the press and the general public, that is to say, the socially recognised ability to speak and act in this field (Bourdieu, 1976). Thus, in 1953, publicity given to a kidney transplant taken from a mother to save her child (the “Marius Renard case”) gave rise to controversies concerning the role of the media in the dissemination of medical news.

The advent of science journalism

In the field of journalism in the 1950s, a main pole developed, composed of professional journalists specialised in the field of science who served as interlocutors for the highest medical authorities. They considered that medical news must be treated in the same way as other news – not trusting the henhouse to the fox. “Our argument has always been the same. You have only to entrust the judicial entry to a former magistrate, you have only to entrust the heading of the facts to a former assassin got out of jail!”, Pierre Bourget, a scientific journalist of the time, explained ironically.

The medium of producers of scientific information for the general public was in this period very restricted and relatively homogeneous. No specialisation, especially medical, had yet emerged within the category of “scientific journalist”. It was only gradually that scientific information was endowed, like the economy for example, with its own specialised journalists, its own headlines in the newspapers of general information and its own press.

This sub-space of the journalistic field included a minority pole made up of medical journalists close to the dominant positions in the medical field. This was essentially embodied by Dr Henriette Fiessinger, first head of medical information for the daily broadsheet *Le Monde*. After studying medicine in Paris, Dr Fiessinger worked for the medical press from the beginning of the 1940s. She believed that medical information was a type of information which must be covered by specialists: “The problem [of Medical information] would be largely resolved if the newspapers agreed to entrust the drafting of medical sections to doctors” (Fiessinger, 1954, p. 154). Medical professors, such as Paul Milliez, shared a similar position. They considered medical news should be “shaped by a professional journalist with the collaboration and control of the physician” (Bayon, 1967, p. 1217). Dr Fiessinger also embodied those Christian doctors who had an educational vision of medical outreach.

The group of scientific journalists consisted mainly of journalists, graduates of higher education, who trained on the job before gradually moving into specialising in the field at the beginning of the 1950s. Science was then one of the many entry opportunities in journalism, at a time when writing was booming and recruitment procedures were informal, with the social capital of

relationships playing a decisive role. These journalists rarely had scientific training. Like their counterparts in the US (Fralely, 1963, pp. 323-328), they most often undertook higher education in humanities and social sciences (Boltanski & Maldidier, 1969, p. 75). Most belonged to social groups with a strong cultural capital:

This is the case of one of the oldest of them – he was born at the turn of the century – Pierre de Latil who works among others for the daily broadsheet *Le Figaro*, followed law studies and specializes at the end of his career in scientific journalism. But the same goes for the generation born around the 1920s, who was very active in structuring this microcosm. For example, Nicolas Skrotzky, born in Russia and son of an investigating judge, has taken a degree in various fields (anthropology, biology, geography in particular) and institutions (the Ecole du Louvre, the Institute of Indian studies and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes). Beginning as Russian translator editor at Agence France Presse at the end of the war, he circulates in several departments before becoming a scientific columnist in the early 1950s to the popular newspapers *Parisien Libéré* and *France Soir* while producing public television and radio programs. (Société générale de presse, 1973)

Most of them saw themselves as general popularisers, as evident in their answers to the survey of Luc Boltanski and Pascale Maldidier (1969, p. 80), as they fitted into Boltanski and Maldidier's pedagogue or writer model. Their studies and career paths undoubtedly brought them to such a representation of themselves, and they also wrote numerous other works (fictions and/or essays). Science was one of the fields in which these journalists could practise their literary activity while trying to promote the dissemination of a cultural capital, based on knowledge of science and technology, seen as less socially legitimate than literature. They saw science as an object to be presented seriously but attractively. Their books show that they perceived scientific life as the story of a story or an adventure. For these journalists, it was a question of developing scientific culture within a broad and popular public, and not only the dominant and/or specialised fractions, including those removed from science as a result of streaming in the school system (*Education et Société*, 1984, pp. 80-81).

This small group of journalists gradually organised in the first half of the 1950s to promote processing of scientific information (especially medical) that stands out for both the broadsheet daily *Le Monde* and the scientific chronicle of the “service academician”, as Robert Clarke (1975, p. 150)⁵ explains. They aspired to “trivialise” scientific information: “The day when it will be considered as a news item in the news media, we will have taken a big step ...” (Roqueplo, 1974, p. 34). They were fighting too much specialisation of scientific information and believed that specific studies were not mandatory to carry out their work.

This view seems to be widely shared by the leading professionals who passed a resolution on medical information at the Congress of the International Federation of Newspaper Editors and Magazines in Vienna in May 1955. This text (International Union of the Medical Press, 1956: 25-26) presents a point of view which appears to be at least the majority of representatives of French journalists. Explaining that “the public has the right to be informed of the medical progress from which it can be directly benefited”, the authors of the resolution consider that medical information must be considered as the other [information] and should not be subject to “restrictions or effects of ‘official’ doctrine or medical ‘dirigisme’”. They call for the organization of press conferences and the setting up of “medical documentation centers adapted to the needs of the press”. Conversely, there are several recommendations for journalists [to]: “weigh the possible implications” of the articles, avoid “brutal and sensational presentation” or “never publish articles that would allow readers to treat themselves”. (Union Internationale de la Presse Médicale, 1956)

At the initiative of people including Andre Labarthe, physicist and then director of the magazine *Constellation*, which was the equivalent in France of *Reader's Digest*, the Association of Science Journalists of the News Media (AJSPI in French) was founded in March 1955, giving a formal existence to this small, friendly group. As in other journalistic specialties, the organisation of this group was partly related to the satisfaction of professional objectives so as to improve daily work. French journalists were also very active in setting up international associative structures on the American or Asian model (Skrotzky, 1989).

They were then looking for a double legitimacy. They claimed a professional approach to their activity (Ackermann & Dulong, 1971) modeled on that of scientists. They were also trying to differentiate themselves from a journalism that was considered "sensationalist" by showing a willingness to "encourage active collaboration with researchers in all fields to ensure responsible and objective public information" (*Annuaire de l'AJSPI*, 1995). The quest for external legitimacy was a prerequisite for achieving relative autonomy in their productions, and these professional journalists feared, according to Robert Clarke, that "scientists, engineers, doctors [would] come to treat" these stories themselves and compete with the journalists in the labour market of journalism. They were indeed very present in the high-level professional or specialised press, most of them in the Association of French Scientific Writers (AESF in French): 49.5 per cent of the journalists or scientific writers recruited by this organisation had practised the professions of researcher, teacher or engineer (Boltanski & Maldidier, 1969, p. 74).

But the search for legitimacy with the scientific authorities was mainly aimed at building better relationships with those who worked in the sector (especially physicians), who were often reluctant towards the media, and sought to control them. "We wanted to take care of news," explained Pierre Bourget. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, AJSPI members were inspired by the American model, visits to laboratories, the creation of training courses, and even the early press relations positions within scientific institutions. Thus, one of the founders of the AJSPI noted that the National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS in French) created in the early 1970s an "autonomous press service", responding to requests by specialised journalists.

This group of specialised journalists also sought to acquire legitimacy from the chief executives of the media to which they belonged. The AJSPI was constituted as the interlocutor of the medical authorities at a time when, as in the first half of the 1950s, they were trying to maintain or consolidate their control.

Information under journalistic and medical control

Journalists specialising in scientific news gradually established regular relations and built up social capital (Bourdieu, 1980). This small group benefited from privileged information thanks to the personal relations established with a series of mandarins and young professors, particularly in the famous hospitals of Paris. The commitment of "great bosses" such as Professor Paul Milliez, specialist in the treatment of high blood pressure, was decisive. The *modus vivendi* had the effect of placing, from the late 1950s, the scientific and medical information in the national mainstream media under a double relative control. It was managed at the same time by a small group of specialised journalists and by the main scientific authorities. At the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, the AJSPI, whose numbers were increasing, was recognised by the main scientific authorities. For example, the association regularly organised meetings with researchers, some of whom appeared on a committee awarding the "Discovery Prize", created in 1957.

Scientific and medical information for the general public was often presented in a positive light, and journalists highlighted the great advances in science. The atomic bomb, but more broadly nuclear energy, during the Cold War period, as well as new technologies (such as computers), spaceflight and medical advances (such as open heart surgery and polio vaccine) were the subject

of numerous reports. The “Science and Technology” section developed and attracted editors and heads of the main newspapers because it brought new topics. Like the broadsheet newspaper *Le Monde*, a popular mass-circulation daily, *Le Parisien Libéré*, published a series of articles written by journalists who had spent some weeks abroad. The scientific journalists grouped in the AJSPI tended to produce news that was scientifically controlled, which suggested that journalists were very dependent on their sources. They perceived their role, in Robert Clarke’s words, as that of “mediator”, “informant”, or even “intermediary” between lay people and scientists, and refused to be “auxiliaries” of scientists or “health educators” of the population (Soutoul-Sanders, 1985; Veylon, 1978, p. 951). The positive relationship of these journalists to science and those who represented it owed much to their academic and professional trajectories and to the attendance of the great French scientists. As we have seen, the great majority had not taken any scientific studies.

I did HEC [the most famous business school in France] ... I wanted to be a journalist and my tendency was rather literary, I was always more inclined towards the letters than towards the sciences. Science, it annoyed me rather. And then I discovered an exciting world. I was lucky enough to gain the confidence of Professor O [the name is anonymised] who was at the time ... at Gustave Rouissy, in Villejuif, the director ... of the major national cancer research center. Who trusted me, who agreed to somehow patronise me. (Interview with a scientific journalist of the time, J1)

Journalists, especially on television, sometimes contributed, particularly when scientists collaborated with them, to promoting almost hagiographic representations of science, as Dorothy Nelkin noted of science journalism in the US (1987). This was personalised through researchers who were presented as unusual individuals who engaged in works that were at once mysterious and incomprehensible as well as objective and disinterested. The Nobel Prize awards attracted the attention of specialist journalists.

But this domain took on a more political and nationalistic dimension in the economic and especially military competition that marked the international relations of the post-war years. In the face of increasing US domination, some French political leaders intended to build a “scientific state” which guaranteed relative economic, political and technological independence (Gilpin, 1970). Research was a means of re-establishing France as a “great nation”, as the daily press of the time (Rouban, 1988, p. 95) testified. This was particularly true in space and nuclear research. Scientific information became progressively, at least in the headlines of the political and intellectual media such as *Le Monde*, a national and international political issue. At the same time, from the 1970s, the press, both in France and in the US (Rothman, 1990, pp. 117-133), increasingly dealt with negative consequences of scientific progress, for example, in environmental issues.

The peculiarity of this sub-space was its relative autonomy within the journalistic universe, as it was a place of practices which aimed in part to neutralise competition that may have had consequences for “quality” information. Science journalists formed a group somewhat apart in journalism: very cooperative and comparable in operation to their American counterparts described as an “inner club” (Dunwoody, 1980). Thus, they were willing, on occasion, to mobilise to protest against sanctions against them, for example, when Nicolas Vichney at *Le Monde* and Nicolas Skrotzky at Agence France Presse lost access to certain information and organised a blackout on reports disseminated by government departments or public agencies.

We were not at war with one another, and then the newspapers had the great concern to have an exclusive and original information. As it was a vast field of activity, one could almost share the exclusives (laughs) in some way. So there was not really any competition, when there was one that came out with an original piece of news, the next day there was another one that was coming out with another piece of news. (Interview with a scientific journalist of the popular newspaper *Le Parisien Libéré*, 1995, J2)

Journalist spokesman: example of TV program *Les médicales*

Scientific information produced by television channels occupied a singular position in the 1950s. This medium, which comprised one state channel in the early 1950s, was in fact marginal in the field of journalism: its distribution was very limited as the owners of television sets represented only 1 per cent of French households in 1954. During the 1960s it increased considerably, with 62 per cent of households owning a television set in 1968 compared with 9 per cent in 1959 (D'Almeida & Delporte, 2003, p. 190). But almost as soon as this new medium was created, the programmers granted a space for scientific programs. This field corresponds to the "vocation" of an instrument intended, according to its leaders of the time, to introduce "culture" to the "people". It was obviously not subject to the constraints audience programmers face today (Champagne, 1994, pp. 10-22). In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, specific programs multiplied (*Sciences d'aujourd'hui*, *Curiosités scientifiques*, *Magazine scientifique*) and news about science was part of the recurring themes of more general issues (*Les coulisses de l'exploit*, *Visa pour l'avenir*, *Les bâtisseurs du monde*, *Si vous voulez savoir*, *Salut à l'aventure*).

In the program schedule, this type of information had existed since 1954 in the form of a specialised program, *Les médicales*, which had an exceptional longevity, lasting until early 1980. This program was produced by director Igor Barrère and journalist Etienne Lalou, whose trajectories show that, through emerging television, they certainly found an interest in medicine but, more generally, in popularisation.

Before entering television in 1954 at the age of 23, Igor Barrère was an intern, then assistant to famous filmmakers such as Orson Welles and René Clair. He is described as a man "bubbling with ideas and dreaming of getting out of anonymity," writes journalist Yves Courrière (1995, p. 660). To graduate in letters (license) and in medicine (PhD), *Les Médicales* allowed [him] to combine his interest in medicine with his passion for producing and directing. He realised and co-produced both political broadcasts, magazine news reports as *Cinq colonnes à la Une* and science and medicine programs. Igor Barrère collaborated with an older journalist Etienne Lalou, several times decorated for his resistance actions during the Second World War, who shared his interest in popularization. The trajectory of the latter shows this passion for popularisation in general and literature in particular, which is one of the characteristics of many popularisers of the time. Son of a professor of French and literary critic, Etienne Lalou had followed studies of letters (license). He was a French television broadcaster and was responsible for French-language literary programming and editor-in-chief of the BBC's French service in London. Author of numerous novels and essays, he has also held editorial responsibilities in several publishing houses and was literary critic at the newsmagazine *L'Express*. (*Who's Who France*, 2007).

The staging was pedagogical; the journalists served as the microphone holders for the mandarins clothed in their white coats and interviewed with respect. The representation of medicine was idealised. Innovative technologies, which were implemented by leading university-hospital managers who were sure of their knowledge, were presented as always perfectly mastered. The show took place mainly in settings at the most famous Parisian hospitals (such as St Louis, Necker and Cochin). Control was also exercised in the selection of topics. Managers of *Les médicales* followed specialties and traditional medicine hierarchies, and did not try to respond to public "expectations". These themes also appeared in an academic study of popular scientific medical information broadcast on television (Recoules, 1973, pp. 16-17).

More than scientific knowledge, the knowledge of the mechanisms of the human body was essentially a technical knowledge that was provided (Leblanc, 1991). In the medical disciplines, unlike in the 1990s (Peneff, 1997, pp. 273-274), surgery (including heart) was a particularly pres-

tigious specialty medicine. Surgical procedures were especially suitable, because of their properties, for the more visual media. Data from the National Audiovisual Institute (INA in French) on the topics discussed during the program from 1956 to 1967 show that it was not in this case the “firsts”, such as the famous skin grafts, that were the subject of great interest from TV journalists, but often ordinary operations. Advances in television technology allowed audiences to watch surgery as if from the viewpoint of the surgeon, bringing them closer to the risks and emotions of surgery. Furthermore, the control and direction of medical news on television were facilitated by a specific Science Committee which gave opinions on the content of these medical shows.

The invention of ‘medical journalists’

On radio and television and in the print media, the development of scientific news led, over the years, to specialisation within the group of science journalists. In this process, which extended from the 1950s to 1970s, medical news progressively became autonomous from scientific journalism. The creation of medical sections in the general press was a first clue. Agence France Presse founded a medical section in the late 1950s, while *Le Monde*’s medical section was established in 1956. But the news in this area was still mostly generated by doctors as an extension of their practice, or, as we have seen, by scientific journalists who, through their work, became interested in medical issues. In the second half of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, medical sections run by full-time journalists began spreading in the main national mainstream media. Before this, only large newspapers had full-time medical columnists (*Notes et études documentaires*, 1973).

A second index of empowerment was the creation in 1970 of the National Association of Journalists of Medical Information (ANJIM in French). While this association did not apparently include the entire cohort of medical writers (Coupin, 1974, p. 25), it was representative in the 1970s of the subset of medical journalists from the mainstream press. The association brought together several dozen journalists from generalist media, medical and trade press – some working for both – as well as doctors who reported for sections therein.

The association drew attention to journalists and news outlets considered by medical authorities to have sensationalised medical news. The ANJIM, through its activities (meetings with organisations, creating a prize, and so on), aimed to represent medical journalism as a specialised journalism to peers, sources and the public, and to strengthen the position of medical news in the general press. This development was only possible because access to the medical field became easier. Members of the ANJIM raised, in turn, the creation of media relations roles. They held regular meetings with specialist doctors, mobilising external support, including mandarins, which was a necessary condition for the development of medical reporting. The goal of members was also, on the one hand, to regulate internal competition within this microcosm and, on the other, to promote a form of professional cooperation for sharing information.

A Monde apart

In this emerging subfield of medical journalists in the 1960s and 1970s, the broadsheet daily *Le Monde* occupied a special place. On the one hand, a majority of journalists defended professional specificity against the danger of reporting of medical news being restricted to medical professionals who constituted a significant proportion of ANJIM membership. On the other, representatives of physicians believed that established medical journalism should be occupied by medical professionals (Kurz, 1967) – the second pole was particularly embodied by doctor journalists who succeeded in the medical section of *Le Monde*.

If *Le Monde* occupied a unique position in medical journalism, it was because, unlike other media executives, its director at the time (1944-1969), Hubert Beuve-Mery, had always wanted to entrust the reporting of medical information to doctors during the 1950s. Dr Henriette Fiess-

inger, daughter of a lawyer, the wife of a professor of medicine and a close friend of the director, had assured the monitoring of medical information for *Le Monde*. Dr Fiessinger was replaced by Claudine Escoffier-Lambiotte, who helped create in 1956 the daily section on medicine that she directed until 1988. Her contribution was so important that a prize was created in her memory in 1996 by the Foundation for Medical Research. Dr Escoffier-Lambiotte had accumulated educational qualifications including three doctorates in medicine and, aged 30 in 1956, she thought the time had come to “give a hand”⁶ at the request of the director of *Le Monde*. Medical and scientific news, in a newspaper which devoted significant space to international and national politics, was not a priority:

I said, “I have no time at all, etc.”. He said, “but it’s nothing, you come twice a week, you watch the dispatches of the AFP [Agence France Presse], it is limited to that”. So I was in a corner of the newsroom ... and then I quickly saw looking at dispatches AFP that there was absolutely nothing in it. Finally, anything that matched my training anyway. (Escoffier-Lambiotte, 1993)

The unique position of the medical section of *Le Monde* reflected both the position of this famous broadsheet and the social properties of Claudine Escoffier-Lambiotte. She was not defined as a “journalist” but rather as a “doctor who strayed into journalism”. She knew all the great names of French medicine and served on the board of the Institut Pasteur. She signed her articles “Dr Escoffier-Lambiotte”, and had a view of medical news involving a high level of information and analysis. She wrote articles after having gathered documentation on the subject including articles in international scientific journals in English. She was tied to an instructional design of medical information that suggested “every good man as they say could not do without a scientific-literary training” (Escoffier-Lambiotte, 1993). She embodied strongly the domination and tradition of journalists specialising in writing at *Le Monde*.

The position of this newspaper in the subspace of medical journalists gave one the sense that the organisation was not only old but also – as in science – better staffed than other titles in the national daily press. Dr Escoffier-Lambiotte helped establish medicine as an autonomous specialty at *Le Monde*, establishing a weekly supplement entitled “*Le Monde de la médecine*” in 1967 and hiring, in the late 1960s, journalist Martine Allain-Regnault and archivist Michèle Evin. In the mid 1970s, Claire Brisset, a young journalist with a diploma from IEP Paris and a father who was a renowned psychiatrist, further strengthened the team. Ms Allain-Regnault led reporting of molecular biology and Ms Brisset explored health cost problems and health in developing countries.

A case of ‘specialists’

If medical news was present in television programs, the creation of specific topics appeared relatively late compared with the headlines of the Parisian press. This discrepancy perhaps reflected chief editors’ low interest in these issues and especially the modest means of early French public television. The first journalists, who were not medical journalists, like François de Closets (science) and Emmanuel de la Taille (economy), began appearing at the ORTF in 1965. François de Closets, who later became a famous television journalist and essayist, worked at Agence France Presse (1960-1965) and the monthly magazine *Sciences et Avenir* in 1964. After general reporting, from 1962 – he was then 29 years old – de Closets rose quickly to the position of specialist by accumulating scientific culture “on the job”, having had no training in this area – his qualifications were in political science (IEP Paris) and law (graduate degree in history of law and public law).

Faced with the increasing complexity of some areas, broadcasters wanted to give credibility pledges to health officials: “I introduced someone new: the specialist. Because it did not exist, everyone knew everything, we told anything ... and we have hired the best,” said Edouard Sa-

blier, an official of television news (Brusini & James, 1982, p. 119). At first, these “experts” were “frowned upon”, as one of them explained, because the journalist must be able “to talk about everything”. The journalists gradually became involved in editing and diversification of television news, a field still largely dominated by politics.

At first, the medical round was held by Pierre Bourget, who was not scientifically trained. He entered television in 1960 after working in the popular press. He embodied until his departure in 1987 the “old school” in which, in his words, “medical news can only be positive ... and talk about the most common diseases”. He said (J2) the round should focus on news of medicine in the strict sense – “research-prevention therapy” – and take no interest in political or economic issues.

It was the same for Martine Allain-Regnault in her round. Having a licence in biology and graduate diploma in physiology, she continued the family tradition: a Centrale engineer father and a sister in pharmacy (*Le Figaro*, April 6, 2002). Ms Allain-Regnault took an auxiliary Master of Natural Sciences for two years before becoming a journalist. From then, in the eyes of her colleagues, she pursued an educational and challenging approach to medical information, working as a journalist at *Le Monde*. Reportedly she wanted to dissect “everything that could get close [to] or far [from] the scientific and medical discoveries but with a willingness always to be learning”. Avoiding journalism as “pontificating”, she “wanted to do more ‘consumer’ stuff, closer to the public”, says a former specialist journalist who worked with her (J4). She also strongly emphasised the human dimension through reports on the experiences of patients, as she recounts in testimony (*Education et Société*, 1984, pp. 83-84).

If medical information was not present in television news on the first and second public channels, it found a place in the 1970s in specific magazines such as *Les médicales* on the first channel, scientific magazines in the evening (*L’Avenir du futur*) or programs for a female audience in the afternoon (*Aujourd’hui Madame* and *Le regard des femmes*, respectively, broadcast on the first and second channels). Medicine was also treated more promptly in general programs (*Les dossiers de l’écran*, *Fenêtre sur*, which developed a regular medical news slot) or in long series such as *Les jours de notre vie*. It was not until the second half of 1970 that a sharper line was drawn between science and medicine.

This period of post-war to the 1970s thus showed a progressive development of medical journalism in general news media, which would accelerate sharply and take other forms in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, compared with the following decades, it is clear that between the late 1940s and the 1970s the struggles around health in France were confined to relatively limited spaces (Gaïti, 1999, p. 159). These topics were now more a matter for specialists. Thus the historical comparison also shows that media representations were more consensual, since they were largely the product of the work of major medical institutions in collaboration with journalists. Just as the political magazines reflected the position of journalists against politicians (Darras, 1997, p. 11), science reporting in the general media was monopolised by a small group of mandarins.

Notes

1. This article is a shortened and somewhat revised version of a text previously published in French (Marchetti, 2010, chapter 1).
2. This history of medical and scientific news only covers the distribution of health in the national mainstream media (headings, thematic programs, and so on) in France and not the medical press and specialised consumer press. It relied heavily on existing work on the subject,

on interviews with journalists working at the time, as well as archival analysis (journals, library funds of the Academy of Medicine, Archives of the National audiovisual Institute, and so on). Articles and reports have obviously been consulted. For more information, see Marchetti, 2010.

3. To understand the French case, the US is used when possible as the point of comparison.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, the extracts quoted are excerpts of interviews conducted by the author between 1992 and 1997.

5. Some eminent members of the Academy of Sciences in France wrote scientific columns in the newspapers. This explains this typically French expression.

6. A part of this paragraph is mainly based on an interview (J3) with Claudine Escoffier-Lambotte, which was directed by Patrick Champagne in 1993, and an obituary in *Le Monde* on January 6, 1996. On this, see also Champagne and Marchetti, 2005.

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