

Misinformation in the UK media: reporting on cancer in the Royal Household

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Abstract

The media play a central role in providing information and news on cancer prevention and advances in cancer research, which ultimately influence policy-making. It is therefore essential that the information disseminated is accurate and taken from credible sources. In this study, we sought to assess the quality of cancer reporting in UK newspapers and to review the credibility of the sources used for information on cancer diagnosis in the Royal Household. A total of 72 stories published in UK newspapers in the 40 days following the news of King Charles III's and Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis on 5 February 2024 and 22 March 2024, respectively, contained information related to cancer and were assessed for the accuracy of the information and source credibility. About 26% of the stories were found to have made false claims related to cancer or cancer care. Misinformation was most commonly about standard cancer treatments (47% of misinformation), followed by cancer epidemiology (21%) and then complementary and alternative medicine (16%). Source credibility was variable, with most misinformation published by journalists without a health information background or quoted by individuals with no oncology or medical background. In conclusion, the quality of newspaper reporting on cancer is variable, and urgent measures should be taken to address this. Potential strategies include stricter standards for health reporting and greater transparency regarding source credibility. Closer collaboration between the press and the healthcare community is also required.

Keywords: *misinformation, media reporting, cancer*

Background

The reporting of cancer care in the media may influence not only decisions made by members of the public regarding their health, but also, more broadly, policy-making and individual patient care. A cancer diagnosis in a public figure generates significant media interest [1]. For example, Angelina Jolie and Deborah James have been the focus of significant, but often inaccurate, media reporting [2]. Such reporting comes at a time when the public is being exposed to ever greater social and traditional media, as well as increasing levels of misinformation. Unlike the general reporting of cancer in the media, human interest stories have greater emotional and political impact [3].

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Health misinformation is defined as health-related information that is inaccurate or misleading according to established scientific knowledge or the best available scientific evidence at the time [4]. This should be distinguished from disinformation, which is the deliberate publication of false or misleading information to advance a particular political, ideological or other agenda [5, 6]. Malinformation is a form of disinformation disseminated with the intent to harm an individual or group of individuals [7].

The main newspapers in the UK are classified as either broadsheets or tabloids, two established categories of print media. Broadsheets traditionally have larger page sizes and are associated with more analytical reporting on current affairs, whereas tabloid newspapers tend to prioritise sensationalised stories presented in a more informal and accessible style [8, 9]. However, several newspapers that provide analytical reporting have changed from broadsheet to tabloid format, such as *The Times* and *The Guardian*.

The news of King Charles III's cancer diagnosis, which was announced by Buckingham Palace on 5 February 2024, and subsequent news of Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis on 22 March 2024, created an environment for misinformation on cancer. We hypothesised that there would be significant misinformation in newspaper stories following the announcement of both King Charles III's and Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis, through a variety of speculative and selective pathways. We aimed to assess the degree of misinformation in UK newspaper reporting and to review the credibility of the sources making claims related to cancer and cancer care in these contexts.

Methods

The full-text database Factiva, ©Dow Jones, was searched for stories in 19 newspapers or news websites that have the largest circulation across the UK or regionally that contained the strings 'cancer' and ('King' or 'Princess'). The newspapers are listed in Table 1. Papers published in the 40 days following the news of King Charles III's and Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis, on 5 February 2024 and 22 March 2024, respectively, were extracted from the database by a bibliometrician (GL). A total of 326 stories were downloaded, but after examination of the headlines and full texts of the stories, only 72 were found to be about cancer or cancer care for the two Royal patients, and the others were discarded.

The full text of each story meeting the inclusion criteria was analysed thematically and the following information was collected: the name of the newspaper and whether it was a tabloid or broadsheet, the journalist's name and their situation or job title (if they were a newspaper correspondent or freelance journalist and whether or not they had a background in health journalism). Finally, we also assessed the credibility of any person or organisation making claims related to cancer. They were classified into three groups: those with a medical qualification or reputable position, such as the National Health Service (NHS) website or Cancer Research UK, without a medical qualification or background, or no information about qualifications available/position not stated.

Table 1. Newspapers searched for stories about cancer in King Charles III and Catherine, Princess of Wales, in 2024.

Newspaper title	Type (if not national daily)	Newspaper title	Type (if not national daily)
Belfast Telegraph	Regional	Sunday Mirror	Sunday
Daily Express		Sunday Times	Sunday
Daily Mail		The Guardian	
Daily Mirror		The Observer	Sunday
Daily telegraph		The Scotsman	Regional
Financial Times		The Sun	
Independent		The Times	
Mail on Sunday	Sunday	Western Telegraph	Regional
Metro		Yorkshire Post	Regional
Sunday Express	Sunday		

The topics of the stories were categorised into raising awareness of cancer, new treatment or technology, lifestyle recommendations, cancer epidemiology, information about standard cancer treatment, complementary and alternative medicine and issues with NHS cancer care.

The correctness of the claims related to cancer was scored using a five-point scale by two oncologists (TY and AA) as either entirely correct, mostly correct with some factual inaccuracies, mostly incorrect, clearly incorrect or not possible to judge.

Results

There were 305 newspaper stories referring to King Charles III, and 553 to Princess Catherine, and cancer. Of these, 265 and 521, respectively, did not make cancer-related claims and were excluded. We identified 40 stories about King Charles III and 32 about Princess Catherine, which were found to make claims related specifically to cancer or cancer care, and these were retained for analysis (see [Appendix Table A1](#)).

Of these 72 stories, 6 were published in broadsheets (8% of stories), the remainder in tabloids. The newspapers with the most stories were *The Independent* ($n = 16$, 22%), followed by the *Daily Mail* ($n = 10$, 14%), the *Daily Mirror* ($n = 9$, 12%) and *The Guardian* ($n = 7$, 10%).

Some 49 stories (68%) were written by newspaper correspondents, almost half of whom (24) had a background in medicine or health journalism. Eleven (15%) of the stories were written by freelance journalists, seven of whom did not have a background in medicine or health journalism. In the remaining 12 stories (17%), the journalist's name was not given. Where information related to cancer was quoted from a person or organisation ($n = 25$), six of the claims were made by an individual with either no medical background ($n = 2$) or whose name or background was not stated. Two of the stories (one in the *Metro* and another in *The Guardian*) quoted 'leading doctors' and 'medical experts' but did not name them.

The most common topics discussed in the stories were the epidemiology of cancer and information on standard cancer treatments, such as systemic therapies (chemotherapy and immunotherapy), surgery and radiotherapy. These topics were present in 45% of the stories. Creation of greater awareness of cancer was the next most common topic (17%), followed by issues with cancer care in the NHS (14%). Lifestyle recommendations and new treatment or technology each accounted for 9% of the topics, and the least common topic was complementary and alternative medicine (5% of topics).

Of the 72 stories, 19 (26%) were deemed to be factually incorrect and made false claims related to cancer. Of these, the claims made about cancer and cancer care were deemed to be entirely incorrect (inaccurate and untruthful) in 6 stories (8%), and the other 13 stories (18%) contained at least some factual inaccuracies.

The large majority (16 out of 19) of factually incorrect stories were published in tabloid newspapers, with only two in broadsheets. In 10 out of the 19 factually incorrect stories, the journalist did not have a background in health journalism, and in two of the factually incorrect stories, the journalist's name was not given. Of the three stories in which a false claim about cancer was made by an individual, in two of them the individual did not have a medical background.

Of the 19 stories containing false claims related to cancer, 9 were related to standard cancer treatments, followed by 4 on cancer epidemiology and 3 on complementary and alternative medicine. Examples of misinformation about standard cancer treatments include that chemotherapy is only used for cancers which are potentially curable and that it is often curative even when given on its own [10]; that nonsmall cell lung cancer is usually treated with surgery [11]; and that patients will lose their hair and eyebrows during cancer treatment (which is not the case for many cancer treatments, including some types of chemotherapy) [12]. Examples of misinformation related to cancer epidemiology include that there is no difference in the incidence of cancer between people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, and that King Charles III's prognosis may be good because he does not have a significant family history of cancer (he does; his grandfather died of lung cancer) [13, 14].

Misinformation related to complementary and alternative therapies included that homoeopathy may be an effective treatment for cancer [15], and that the solar eclipse was a hopeful sign for Princess Catherine's recovery, as it would be appearing 6 months after her cancer treatment started [16]. Misinformation about NHS cancer care included that patients should bypass general practitioners who 'frequently miss the early signs of cancers when more reliable blood tests could quickly assess the risks' – not all cancers can be diagnosed on blood tests, and nonspecific testing for tumour markers would likely add further pressure on resources and generate longer waiting times [17].

Discussion

The media interest that followed the news of two cancer cases in the Royal Family provided an opportunity for the credibility of cancer reporting to be assessed. In particular, we checked major topics and themes and the extent of misinformation. In this analysis, we found that it was most commonly related to standard cancer treatments (chemotherapy, immunotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy), which may influence decisions made by cancer patients regarding their treatment and their compliance with treatment.

Misinformation regarding cancer in the media is of concern owing to its potential to affect the management and outcomes of patients with cancer as well as cancer care and policy-making generally. Evidence from previous studies suggests that media coverage on cancer influences the beliefs and behaviour of both patients and medical professionals, and misinformation can therefore have negative effects in the real world [18–23]. Those most susceptible to cancer misinformation tend to have lower levels of education and health literacy, less trust in healthcare and more positive views on alternative medicine [24]. There is emerging evidence that the media tend to overemphasise the potential efficacy of cancer drugs and rarely discuss treatment failure or toxicities, and that patients have unrealistic expectations regarding the curative potential of their treatment [25–27]. This is demonstrated in our analysis, where one example of misinformation was the claim that chemotherapy is often curative. A retrospective analysis on UK newspaper reporting on the NHS cancer drugs fund from 2010 to 2015 found that media coverage was positively slanted and did not reflect the mounting evidence of its ineffectiveness [28].

Our analysis further supports the growing evidence that there is a systemic problem with cancer reporting in the media. Health journalists have been shown to prioritise public interest when selecting cancer research topics to report on [29], and are more likely to cover medical research with weaker methodology and observational studies than randomised controlled trials [30, 31]. The media also cover certain cancers (such as breast, colon, brain cancer and leukaemia) disproportionately more than others relative to their incidence, and tend to reflect celebrity endorsement and corporate funding [32–37].

Statements made about cancer in the media should ideally be made by individuals with medical qualifications or medical organisations, and greater transparency on the sources used would allow the reader to be better informed of their credibility before they may be influenced on decisions regarding their health. In this analysis, when claims related to cancer were quoted from a person or organisation, six of the claims were made by someone with either no medical background or whose name and background were not stated.

The majority of the stories deemed to be factually incorrect were published in tabloids, which typically have a larger circulation than broadsheets. Readers of these newspapers may assume that the information published has been verified and may be less sceptical of information they read in widely circulated newspapers compared to information on social media, although there is evidence that health misinformation on social media is often believed by viewers to be true [38]. A study amongst US adults found that participants with cancer believed misinformation related to cancer treatment to be true more often than those without a diagnosis, which suggests that individuals with cancer may be more vulnerable to misinformation regarding cancer treatment [38].

Our findings show the need for health misinformation in the media to be urgently addressed. The Editors' Code of Practice outlines ethical standards for the press in the UK, and includes the requirement for journalists to verify facts and avoid publishing misleading content [39]. Although there are two regulatory bodies in the UK that enforce this, press regulation is voluntary, and publishers decide which regulatory body, if any, to join [40]. The burden of identifying health misinformation currently lies disproportionately with the public. Strategies to address misinformation may include stricter standards for verification of information and independent regulation, and educational interventions for journalists and editors on verification of information related to health. The provision of accurate, accessible and comprehensible information about cancer is essential, and the responsibility for this is shared across the healthcare community. Greater transparency on the background of any sources quoted making claims related to cancer is also necessary.

Limitations of our study include that we only analysed stories published in the 40 days following the news of King Charles III's and Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis. A limited number of stories were therefore included in our analysis, which did not allow meaningful statistical analysis. However, a comprehensive search for relevant stories was undertaken, and they are likely to provide a reasonable indication of national reporting trends.

Further analysis is needed on cancer misinformation on social media, where there is likely to be a greater degree of misinformation, and concerning, studies have demonstrated that social media posts containing health misinformation achieve higher engagement levels than factual posts [41–43]. A systematic review of items on health misinformation on social media between 2000 and 2019 found that cancer

and diabetes were the topics with the greatest amount of misinformation [44]. Another systematic review over the same time period found that smoking products and drugs were the topics where the most quality concerns on social media were raised, with moderate rates of misinformation on cancer [45]. An updated review is needed, given that social media are constantly evolving, and misinformation is likely to have become more widespread. Further work is also needed to better understand perceptions of cancer news from the perspective of patients and clinicians, and to identify tailored interventions to counter the spread of cancer misinformation.

Conclusion

To conclude, misinformation regarding cancer and cancer care is being circulated in UK newspapers with potentially damaging consequences. There is an urgent need to address this to reduce the risk of harm to those with lived experience of cancer. Collaboration between the press and the healthcare community needs to be improved to increase the credibility of information published about cancer [46]. Authors and journalists should be encouraged to rely on high-quality, evidence-based sources when reporting on cancer. In addition, reliable websites and platforms that provide accurate and up-to-date cancer information in an accessible, journalist-friendly format should be identified, strengthened and actively promoted to improve the quality of cancer reporting. Greater transparency regarding sources used is essential for accountability and should be a standard for health reporting.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Author contributions

All authors were involved in the conception and design of the manuscript, and performed the initial literature review. All authors critically revised the manuscript and approved the final version.

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Appendix

The 72 stories in UK newspapers that were included for analysis are listed chronologically and grouped by the diagnosis that prompted the coverage. Stories were coded along five dimensions: the main thematic focus, source credibility, author/agent credibility, the cancer-related claims made and an assessment of the factual correctness of the content. 'Quoted source credibility' refers to the person or organisation quoted making claims related to cancer. '-' indicates no external source was quoted.

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories.

Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
1	King Charles discusses cancer therapy as he opens hospital in resurfaced video	Independent Online (Tabloid)	5 Feb	New treatment/technology	UCLH cancer centre provides proton beam therapy, which is 'cutting-edge' and 'ground-breaking' treatment, and is also one of the largest centres for haematological disorders.	–	Entirely correct
2	King Charles cancer diagnosis: Questions about his health answered	Independent Online (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Standard cancer treatments	King Charles cancer treatment could include chemotherapy, radiotherapy or targeted therapy and will be given as an outpatient.	No information on qualifications/ source not stated	Entirely correct
3	Charles cancer shock	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Doctors encourage people to seek medical attention early for symptoms that could be a sign of cancer.	–	Entirely correct
4	Linseed for breakfast and no lunch, how he stays fit	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important during cancer treatment. Studies suggest it can help manage stress and fatigue caused by cancers and their treatment. Studies have also found that those who exercise during treatment cope better with side effects.	–	Entirely correct
5	King has support of all as he faces cancer	Belfast Telegraph (Broadsheet)	6 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Cancer can affect anyone	–	Entirely correct
6	We wish the King the best of luck for his rest and recuperation	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	One in two of us develops cancer in our lifetime. As the charity Cancer Research UK has noted, the UK has made huge progress in the last 50 years. Partly due to earlier diagnosis and treatment, survival for all cancers has doubled since the early 1970s.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
7	'Over the decades His Majesty has been there for so many people... now a nation must be there for him'	The Sun (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	An unhealthy lifestyle can increase the chances of cancer. Survival rates are improving all the time due to medical breakthroughs and improved treatments.	–	Entirely correct
8	The secrets of a King's physician – what really happens when a monarch is seriously ill	Independent Online (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	King Charles lives a healthy lifestyle by exercising, not smoking, not drinking too much alcohol and eating healthy organic food and skipping lunch, so hopefully his prospects of fully recovering are good.	–	Entirely correct
9	We must investigate all causes of cancer	Metro (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Burden of cancer	Cancer rates have risen greatly in recent years. Half the UK population will develop the disease during their lifetime.	No information on qualifications /source not stated	Entirely correct
10	Treat us all like royalty	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	7 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	Two-fifths are forced to wait longer than the NHS 2-month target for cancer treatment to start.	–	Entirely correct
11	King Charles' openness about cancer diagnosis will help save lives – Scotsman comment.	The Scotsman (Tabloid)	7 Feb	New treatment/ technology	Advances in medicine mean that a growing number of cancer patients will live with the condition for years.	–	Entirely correct
12	If only we could all get cancer care like King Charles's	The Guardian (Tabloid)	7 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	Access to early cancer treatment via the NHS has been massively curtailed due to the conservative government's cuts.	–	Entirely correct
13	Q&A	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	List of red flag signs and symptoms that could indicate possible cancer.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
14	King Charles's morning routine includes Canadian air force exercise plan	The Guardian (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	Exercise is recommended during cancer treatment and recovery. It helps maintain muscle mass and can reduce anxiety and fatigue associated with a cancer diagnosis and treatment. Studies show that staying physically active improves symptoms and side effects in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy. There is also a suggestion that exercise can increase the effectiveness of cancer therapy by improving blood flow and supporting the immune system.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
15	Surge in UK cancer patients going private revealed as King Charles starts treatment	The Guardian (Tabloid)	7 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	The proportion of patients in England waiting less than 62 days from an urgent suspected cancer referral to their first definitive treatment is 65.2%. The target is 85%. One in ten people are being denied treatment within 31 days of a decision being made to treat their cancer. About 90.1% are seen within this timeframe in the UK, lower than the 96% NHS target. Record numbers of people are now paying for private healthcare. Nearly 300,000 people in the UK have paid for chemotherapy in the last 5 years.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
16	This is a potential constitutional crisis that's going to place an immense burden on William	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	7 Feb	New treatment/technology	Due to advances made in cancer treatment in the past decades, some people now can make a full recovery from cancer.	–	Entirely correct
17	The best diet to fight cancer – according to real science (not 'woo')	Independent Online (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	Some foods such as ultra-processed food, ultra-processed or preserved meat and red meat can increase the risk of some cancers. Alcohol can also increase the risk of some cancers. Exercise can reduce the risk of cancer recurrence. There is a lot of misinformation about cancer on social media.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
18	More than a third of cancer patients in England face potentially deadly delays.	The Guardian (Tabloid)	9 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	The 62 days target to start cancer treatment has not been met since 2015. Delays could be 'deadly'.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
19	Identifying 'silent cancers' that don't have symptoms	The Independent (Tabloid)	9 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Possible symptoms of common cancers and the importance of seeking medical attention early for symptoms. Prognosis is likely to be better when cancer is detected early. Liquid biopsies potentially offer noninvasive cancer detection, but their reliability and accuracy can vary and they are still in early stages.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
20	King Charles cancer: Monarch's diagnosis leads to huge surge of web traffic to cancer charity websites	The Scotsman (Tabloid)	11 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Cancer treatment at an earlier stage is more likely to be successful.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
21	The plight of King Charles moves us, but we soon tire of feeling sorry for the poor	The Observer (Tabloid)	11 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	Thousands of people are having to wait more than the maximum recommended 62 days to start treatment. People will die as a result.	–	Entirely correct
22	Utter the 'C' word... and life changes in an instant	Mail on Sunday (Tabloid)	11 Feb	Burden of cancer	Most people over 80 will die with some kind of cancer in their body	–	Entirely correct
23	Website advice visits soar after monarch shares news of his diagnosis	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	12 Feb	Greater cancer awareness NHS cancer care issues	Earlier cancer detection means treatment is more likely to be successful. Unusual or unexplained symptoms and changes, including a new lump or bleeding, can be an early sign. Recent data revealed that every single cancer waiting time target in December 2023 was missed. Only 66% of patients started treatment within 2 months of an urgent referral, missing the target of 85%.	–	Entirely correct
24	Homeopathy is bunkum but it should be available on the NHS	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	12 Feb	Complementary/alternative medicine	Homeopathy relies on 'preposterous theories, with no evidence to back them up'. But many studies from patients with cancer to those with chronic pain have shown that a positive mental outlook helps. They report less pain and require less medication.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
25	King Charles diagnosed with cancer: What is known so far	Independent Online (Tabloid)	13 Feb	Standard cancer treatments	Tests to diagnose cancer can include blood tests, scans and biopsies. A biopsy is a procedure that involves taking a small sample for examination under a microscope to identify whether there are abnormal cells. Cancer treatment can involve chemotherapy – a medicine used to kill cancer cells; radiotherapy; or targeted drugs that find and attack cancer cells.	–	Entirely correct
26	Plant-based diet linked to surprise benefit in men with prostate cancer	Independent Online (Tabloid)	13 Feb	Lifestyle recommendation	A plant-based diet is associated with improved sexual health in men receiving treatment for prostate cancer. Researchers have found that a plant-based diet incorporating more fruit, vegetables, grains and nuts is associated with a reduction in the common side effects of prostate cancer treatment, including bladder and erectile dysfunction.	–	Entirely correct
27	King example should stop men dodging that GP call.	The Sun (Tabloid)	18 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Women are more likely than men to see a doctor for symptoms. It is important to get symptoms checked by a doctor early.	No information on qualifications / source not stated	Entirely correct
28	Let's not police the language we use about cancer	The Guardian (Tabloid)	29 Feb	New treatment/ technology Standard cancer treatments	Many people's experience of cancer is of a single mass found early and fully resected before it metastasises, or of a once-fatal condition now becoming a chronic illness due to modern medication.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
29	King Charles' diagnosis throws UK's long cancer treatment waiting times into sharp relief.	Independent Online (Tabloid)	6 Mar	NHS cancer care issues	Waiting times for cancer treatment have increased in the past few years. Experts say too many cancers are diagnosed too late, and the burden of cancer will grow with the aging population. Cancer affects one in two people in the UK.	–	Entirely correct
30	Ask Dr Miriam	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	8 Mar	Lifestyle recommendation	A Swedish study found that men can lower their risk of prostate cancer by more than a third by exercising more.	–	Entirely correct
31	King Charles cancer: if you can't say anything nice, say nothing at all	Yorkshire Post (Broadsheet)	5 Feb	Burden of cancer	There is no significant difference in the incidence of cancer between people of different backgrounds or socioeconomic status.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
32	Enlarged prostate may have saved him	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Burden of cancer	Half of cancers are diagnosed in people over 70. Cancer can grow more slowly in older people. The earlier the diagnosis is made the better the outcome. People are living longer from cancer now than they were previously. Both chemotherapy and radiotherapy are often curative when used with surgery or on their own.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
33	Cancer has been a rare illness in the Royal Family	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	6 Feb	Burden of cancer	Genetics plays a role in life expectancy and cancer. Since King Charles does not have a significant family history of cancer and his parents both lived to old age, he will hopefully live a long life despite his cancer diagnosis.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
34	The types of cancer the King may have and how they may be treated	The Daily Telegraph (Broadsheet)	6 Feb	Burden of cancer; Standard cancer treatments	Nonsmall-cell lung cancer is usually treated with surgery.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
35	Homeopathic doctor trusted by Charles	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Complementary/ alternative medicine	Many health professionals are supportive of their cancer patients using complementary therapies, but some may prefer their patients not to use them. This is usually because the therapies have not been tested in the same way as more conventional treatment. Alternative therapies are typically used instead of medical treatment but there is no scientific evidence that they can cure cancer, and they can cause harmful side effects or interfere with other treatments.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
36	THE news that King Charles has been [...]	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Greater cancer awareness	Diagnosing cancer at an early stage means more treatment options and likely a more successful outcome. Everyone will be affected by cancer at some point in their life.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*
Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
37	Even in illness, the King is setting an example for nation	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	7 Feb	NHS cancer care issues	Rates of early cancer diagnosis in the UK have been hit by doctors' strikes, cancelled appointments, unavailable GPs and ever-longer waiting lists. The King's revelation has spurred some oncologists to call for diagnostic hubs to speed up the process of testing for cancer. While half of all patients now survive cancer for at least 10 years, the rate of progress in improving prognosis has slowed since 2010, according to a report commissioned by Cancer Research UK. Mark Lawler, a cancer expert and professor at Queen's University Belfast, said: 'The impact of Covid and national lockdowns has set back survival for certain cancers like bowel by almost a decade'. There is also the impact of continuing junior doctors. Our NHS should return to a national cancer strategy. And GPs should be bypassed as they frequently miss the early signs of cancer. More reliable blood tests could more quickly assess the risks.	Medical qualification	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)

Continued

Table A 1. Full listing with characteristics of the 72 analysed news stories. *Continued*

Part A. King Charles III coverage (articles 1–40).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness of claims
38	New cancer therapy may fight old age, too	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	10 Feb	New treatment/ technology	Half of the population will develop cancer in their lifetime but most will recover. One of the most promising types of immunotherapy is CAR T-cell therapy. It is mainly used for advanced, otherwise untreatable forms of blood cancer, such as lymphoma. It is also being trialled for cancers of the lung, liver and prostate.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
39	Family is vital, this proves it	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	7 Feb	Standard cancer treatments	Patients undergoing cancer treatment will lose their hair and eyebrows. Cancer does not discriminate and can affect anyone.	–	Clearly incorrect
40	Orchid essences, oxygen chambers and lots of crying: Have the royals got the right idea about homeopathy?	Independent Online (Tabloid)	4 Mar	Complementary/ alternative medicine	Mixed opinions about homeopathy and its efficacy. Homeopathy is 'worth a shot'. Adreno Complex supports the build-up of cortisol, which is needed to help the body cope better with stress.	Qualifications known, not medical	Mostly incorrect (some accurate)

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72).

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
41	Harry and Meghan lead messages of support from around the world	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Greater cancer awareness	Cancer is often curable when caught early.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
42	Brave Kate's cancer openness can help save many lives	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Burden of cancer	Around half of us will develop cancer in our lifetimes and survival rates are at their highest with advances in medicine.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
43	For once in her life, Kate needs to stop worrying about duty and looking after everyone else and just take care of herself	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Burden of cancer	Cancer 'respects nothing and no one'	–	Entirely correct
44	It's sad and scary, but I believe she'll bounce back	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Explanation of what a biopsy is and preventative chemotherapy	The agent agrees with Princess Kate's medical team that she should have preventative chemotherapy. Chemotherapy can sometimes be given orally and the side effects of the tablets are 'not too debilitating'.	–	Clearly incorrect
45	We were, of course, delighted [...]	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Burden of cancer	Cancer can affect anyone. Explaining a cancer diagnosis to children is challenging.	–	Entirely correct
46	ON behalf of everyone at Cancer [...]	The Daily Express (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Burden of cancer	Nearly half of us will develop cancer in our lifetime. Cancer survival has doubled in the last 50 years. Diagnosing cancer early means that treatment is more likely to be successful.	–	Entirely correct
47	What lies ahead for the Princess of Wales as she undergoes chemotherapy?	The Daily Telegraph (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Chemotherapy is only given for cancers, which are potentially curable. Chemotherapy can be used on its own without any other interventions with curative intent.	–	Clearly incorrect
48	Kate's brave message to help others	The Sun (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Burden of cancer	The most common forms of cancer in the abdomen for women in their 40s are bowel, cervical and womb cancers.	Qualifications known, not medical	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
49	Preventative chemotherapy not official NHS treatment	The Independent (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Preventive chemotherapy is used for people who have not developed breast cancer, but are at increased risk of getting it due to their family history.	–	Clearly incorrect
50	Telling my kids I had cancer was the hardest thing to do	The Independent (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Medicine has improved so significantly that survival rates for many cancers are excellent now. The survival rate for stage 2 breast cancer is 93%.	–	Mostly incorrect (some accurate)
51	Younger patients can tolerate higher doses of chemo	The Times (Tabloid)	23 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Chemotherapy is usually given as cycles of treatment, meaning patients get one drug or combination of drugs, then a rest for 2–4 weeks.	–	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)
52	Kate Middleton cancer -latest: Prince Harry and Meghan 'discovered princess' diagnosis on television'	Independent Online (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Greater cancer awareness	Most people know the big signs of cancer, including lumps, sudden weight loss and bloody stools. But there are many common cancers that come with no symptoms or more unusual symptoms.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
53	What is the preventive cancer treatment for Princess Catherine?	Financial Times (Broadsheet)	24 Mar	New treatment/technology Burden of cancer standard cancer treatments NHS cancer care issues	On average, a course of chemotherapy lasts between 3 and 6 months. Cancer survival rates are generally better for younger people. Over the past few decades, there has been a marked rise in people under 50 being diagnosed with cancer. None of the health service's waiting time targets for cancer care have been met since 2015. Molecular diagnostics have made it possible to analyse the genetic make-up of a tumour, offering the prospect of better tailored treatment.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
54	Princess of Wales' diagnosis: cancers in young are rising, but so are survival rates	The Guardian (Tabloid)	24 Mar	New treatment/technology; Burden of cancer; Standard cancer treatments; NHS cancer care issues	Early diagnosis and better awareness mean tumours can be caught early. If a cancer is left untreated for too long, it can spread with fatal results. Susceptibility to some cancers can be passed on through families, and the genes responsible may be building up in populations because carriers are living longer and having more children. Undetected environmental factors may also be affecting cancer rates. Rising levels of obesity cause rising cancer rates, for example. Younger patients can tolerate higher doses of chemotherapy than older patients.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
55	What is preventive chemotherapy and how effective is it? The Princess of Wales' treatment explained	The Guardian (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Preventive chemotherapy, known formally as adjuvant chemotherapy, is a course of anticancer drugs that is given after primary cancer treatment to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back and spreading. The risk of cancer returning tends to be smaller if the cancer is caught at a very early stage. The side effects of chemotherapy depend on the specific drugs given, but patients can experience tiredness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, an increased risk of picking up infections and a loss of appetite. Younger people often tolerate chemotherapy better than older patients.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
56	Eclipse shows she can overcome this challenge	Mail on Sunday (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Complementary/ alternative medicine	A solar eclipse will appear in both Kate and William's birth chart 6 months after Kate first began treatment, which is generally a significant milestone in chemotherapy. This is a hopeful sign for her recovery.	–	Clearly incorrect
57	Moments of humour allowed me to find a way through the dark days of my own illness.	Mail on Sunday (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	The downside of chemotherapy is the periods of 'neutropenia – when your immune system is weakened and you are banned from socialising'.	–	Clearly incorrect

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
58	Her positive nature will help her prevail	Mail on Sunday (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	The fact that Princess Kate has stated that she is now receiving preventative chemotherapy suggests that her cancer has not spread. If it had, she would be receiving more aggressive chemotherapy. Patients are given a choice: some, particularly the elderly, may weigh the debilitating effects of chemotherapy against their likely life expectancy and decide against it. Many patients report uncomfortable pins and needles in the legs due to damage to the nervous system. As for hair loss – that varies.	–	Entirely correct
59	'She will cope and there's a great chance of success'	Sunday Express (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	The Princess of Wales 'is the type of person to cope "extremely well" with preventative chemotherapy, and there is "no doubt the chances of success are great"'.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
60	Scientists baffled by the worrying increase in UK cancer diagnoses among under-50s	Sunday Express (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Burden of cancer Standard cancer treatments	The number of young people being diagnosed with cancer is rising. Part of this is due to rising obesity and better awareness, but this does not explain everything. Earlier detection leads to better outcomes. When all treatment is finished, it can be a few months before the person is back to nearly full strength. The side effects of chemotherapy can include low blood counts with increased risk of infection, mouth ulcers, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
61	COMMENT By Professor Gordon Wishart Anglia Ruskin University	Sunday Express (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Burden of cancer	More people under the age of 50 are being diagnosed with cancer globally. This is in part due to adoption of a Western lifestyle and almost certainly due to unidentified risk factors. Adjuvant chemotherapy is generally more effective and better tolerated in younger patients and aims to eradicate any residual cancer cells. It is not without side effects.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
62	Relatable royals	The Sunday Times (Broadsheet)	24 Mar	Burden of cancer	Half of us will develop cancer in our lifetime; the rest will help a loved one struggling with it.	–	Entirely correct
63	Euan McCollm: Kate's dignity should have shamed the trolls but, sadly, many won't care	The Scotsman (Tabloid)	24 Mar	Burden of cancer	The risk of developing cancer does not differ between people from different socioeconomic or demographic backgrounds.	–	Mostly incorrect (some accurate)
64	My advice to Kate – from one cancer patient to another	The Independent (Tabloid)	24 Mar	NHS cancer care issues	Some cancer drugs are available in some areas but not others (unless being accessed privately).	–	Entirely correct
65	One in ten cancer cases are diagnosed in patients under 50	The Times (Tabloid)	25 Mar	Lifestyle recommendation; Burden of cancer	The number of people under the age of 50 being diagnosed with cancer is increasing. Researchers have said that although genetic factors play a role, diet is a major contributor. High consumption of red meat, salt and alcohol has contributed to a global rise in cancer cases in young people since the 1990s. Other factors include physical inactivity, obesity and elevated blood sugar levels.	–	Entirely correct

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
66	Kate's diagnosis prompts surge in NHS and cancer charity website visits	Independent Online (Tabloid)	26 Mar	Greater cancer awareness	More than 1,000 people are diagnosed with cancer every day according to Macmillan. Cancer symptoms can vary but may include a new lump, changes in bowel habits or bleeding. Anyone who notices symptoms that are unusual for them should consult their GP. Detecting cancer at an early stage can improve the chances of successful treatment.	–	Entirely correct
67	Inspiring Kate	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	26 Mar	Greater cancer awareness	Early detection of cancer significantly improves survival rates as treatment is started sooner. People should be aware of the symptoms and monitor their body for any changes.	–	Entirely correct
68	How Britain's shameful cancer record betrayed the young	The Daily Telegraph (Tabloid)	26 Mar	NHS cancer care issues	In the UK, cancer patients face delays in diagnosis and treatment, and the NHS has not met several key cancer targets for many years. As a result, cancer mortality rates remain higher than in other developed countries. About 45%–50% of cancers are picked up incidentally. Cancer can develop with few or no obvious symptoms and is often only discovered during a procedure for an unrelated condition.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
69	Sarah's praise for 'unbelievably brave' Princess of Wales	Daily Mail (Tabloid)	26 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Chemotherapy is never a 'walk in the park'.	No qualification info / source not stated	Mostly correct (minor inaccuracies)

Continued

Part B. Princess of Wales coverage (articles 41–72). *Continued*

#	Headline	Outlet (type)	Date 2024	Main theme	Claims about cancer	Quoted source credibility	Correctness
70	Doctor explains what preventative chemotherapy following Princess of Wales cancer diagnosis.	Independent Online (Tabloid)	26 Mar	Standard cancer treatments	Preventative chemotherapy is given in conjunction with other treatments such as a surgery to treat any residual cancer cells, which may have been left behind.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
71	Kate will need all our support	The Daily Mirror (Tabloid)	28 Mar	Burden of cancer	Medical experts report that cancer rates among people under 50 have increased significantly in recent years, and that almost half the UK population is expected to develop cancer during their life.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct
72	What are the 'silent cancers' that don't have any symptoms?	Independent Online (Tabloid)	26 Apr	New treatment/ technology; Greater cancer awareness	Red flag symptoms of cancer listed. Although still in the early stages of development, a groundbreaking diagnostic tool could one day detect cancer through a blood test before symptoms appear. Known as a liquid biopsy, this test is currently being evaluated in clinical trials. It works by analysing circulating tumour DNA, proteins and other biomarkers released by cancer cells into the bloodstream.	Medical qualification	Entirely correct