WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCHERS LEARN TO THINK LIKE JOURNALISTS?

With *Evidence to Impact*, CUGH begins building a cadre of global health researchers ready to be heard

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Human brains are wired to respond to stories, but most health researchers are trained to lead with data. At *Evidence to Impac*t, CUGH's two-day science communication workshop, researchers learned to combine the two, practicing how to turn their own findings into pitches and stories that journalists, policymakers, and the public will act on. The workshop, held September 17 and 18 in Washington, DC, with support from the Pulitzer Center, grew out of a successful CUGH 2026 pre-conference and paired graduate students, faculty, early-career investigators, and health care workers with award-winning science journalists.

Award winning journalists share experiences covering global and local health and sciences stories and offer advice on how to combine science with human interest.

"Your work matters, and the stories you tell make a difference," documentary filmmaker Molly Knight Raskin, told participants, while also sharing examples from her recent work reporting on the human impact of cuts to USAID, as told by people who lost access to local clinics and medications in rural Ghana. Data and a human voice together work better than either one alone.

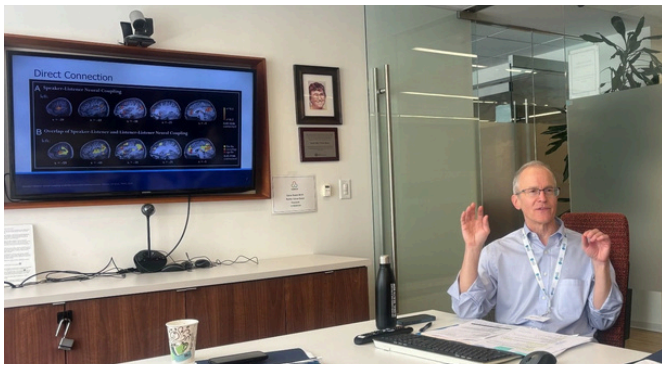
Over the course of the two-day event, graduate students, faculty, early-career investigators, and health care workers learned–and applied–techniques to help them connect through stories, craft a compelling pitch to a reporter, and navigate the pitfalls of misinformation and disinformation that prevent science breakthroughs from reaching people who need them the most.

In small groups, health researchers and practitioners practiced pitching their work and receiving feedback from peers and journalists to improve their narrative.

In small groups, the researchers and health practitioners worked to develop opinion articles and story ideas based on their current work, and the journalist facilitators drew out the most salient points that should go into a pitch or interview with a reporter.

“Your story idea either has to be interesting or significant–and it helps if you can tell me exactly why,” said *Science* Jon Cohen during a session where he shared practical tips to engage with members of the news media. CUGH has compiled this tip sheet, along with other resources from the workshop which will be packaged and made available for wide use.

Sean Hamill, who has spent much of his career at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, added that journalists want to talk to health professionals, as evidenced by his recent coverage of a deadly measles outbreak in Pennsylvania. “I’m amazed and humbled by the number of good people who are trying to do good work and make the health system better.”



Journalist and workshop moderator, Brian Simpson, shares images of the brain lighting up when sharing or hearing a story, evidence of syncing between storyteller and listener.

Several workshop participants described their experiences confronting misinformation and disinformation around health, and Tara Kirk Sell from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Health Security presented her research and shared the *Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Rumors.*

Health-related misinformation is not new, the speed at which it travels online makes it harder to tell the difference between fact and fiction in health. Actions to address rumors and misinformation include leveraging trusted messengers in the community and “prebunking” or getting ahead of possible misinformation.

Most participants left the workshop with more confidence in their ability to write a persuasive article and talk about their work to a member of the media. The researchers and health practitioners who attended committed to take action in the next 30 days to communicate their work by writing an op-ed, reaching out and pitching a story to a journalist, and starting a blog or podcast.

“Journalists are invaluable partners to global health practitioners and researchers,” shared one workshop participant, reflecting on the two-day training. “Don’t discount their capacities as storytellers and our shared commitment to meaningful human impact.”

For CUGH, *From Evidence to Impact* was just the first step toward building a cadre of effective communicators in the health and science fields. In addition to packaging the workshop resources and tools, CUGH is developing plans to replicate the workshop, in-person and virtually.

As one workshop participant said, “Human connection and storytelling are powerful tools for impact.” CUGH will work with our members to ensure that these communication skills are integrated into global health curricula and treated with the same importance as research skills.

Consortium of Universities for Global Health

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