

HIV and professional standards

A number of professional codes advise journalists about professional standards in reporting, including the Editors' Code of Practice which is administered and upheld by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct.

Be accurate. Do your best to ensure work is fair and accurate. Checking HIV stories is important and while there are expert government and voluntary sector bodies who provide information and comment, those sources should never be above criticism or question.

Keep language simple. Do not be afraid to question statements or ask for clarification. Professional or scientific words may sound authoritative, but everyday language should improve the wider understanding of HIV.

Respect privacy. The privacy of people living with HIV and those around them – their families, friends and colleagues – should be respected. Identities and addresses should not be disclosed, or even hinted at, without permission.

Be relevant. Someone's age, sex, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status and sexual orientation should only be mentioned where they are directly relevant to a story. Such irrelevant references perpetuate stigma and discrimination.

Avoid sensationalism. Resist the temptation to sensationalise issues in ways which could be harmful. Sensational language and images can cause unnecessary anxiety for people with HIV as well as more widespread fear. In the past, poor reporting of HIV has cost people living with HIV their jobs and their homes.

Press Complaints Commission The Editors' Code of Practice

The three most relevant sections of the Editors' Code of Practice are:

Clause 1. Accuracy: The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures. A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and – where appropriate – an apology published.

Clause 3. Privacy: Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications. Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent. Account will be taken of the complainant's own public disclosures of information. It is unacceptable to photograph individuals in private places without their consent.

Clause 12. Discrimination: The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability. Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

Further information

NUJ Code of Conduct

www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=174

Press Complaints Commission

www.pcc.org.uk