

Jennifer Webber (650) 854-9400

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's *Health News Index* is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health news stories Americans are following and what they understand about those issues. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,005 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between June 25 and July 25, 2001. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

Health News Stories Followed by the Public

Four major health stories were closely followed by more than half the public during this period. President Bush's proposal to use discount

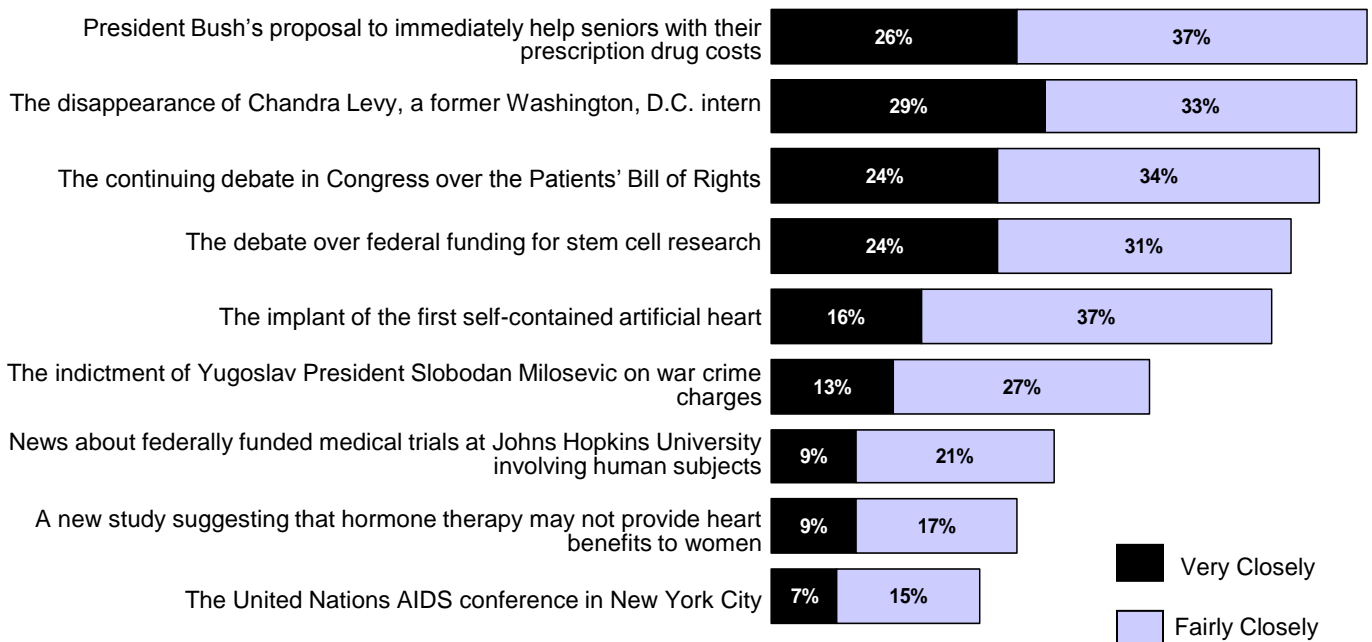
prescription drug cards to help the elderly pay for medicines was closely followed by 63% of Americans; the continuing Patients' Bill of Rights debate by 58%; the debate over federal funding for stem cell research by 55%; and the implant of the first self-contained artificial heart by 53%.

By comparison, 62% of Americans said they closely followed news of Washington intern Chandra Levy's disappearance, and four in ten (40%) followed the indictment of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

Among other health issues in the news, three in 10 (30%) Americans said they followed coverage of the suspension of human medical trials at Johns Hopkins. Slightly over a quarter (26%) of Americans followed news suggesting hormone therapy may not confer heart benefits to women, and 22% closely followed the United Nations AIDS conference in New York City.

KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from June 25 to July 25, 2001

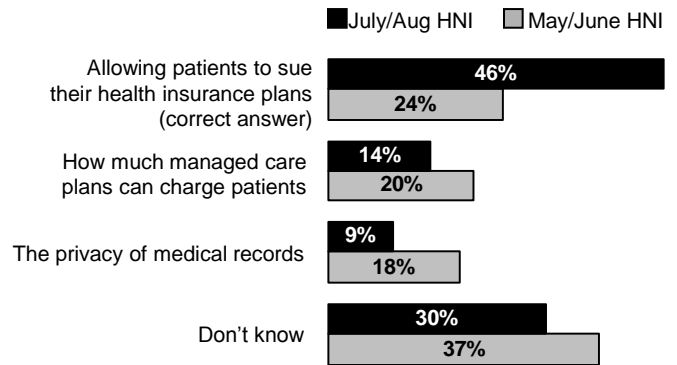


WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

Patients' Rights Legislation

Almost six in ten Americans (58%) said they closely followed news stories about the continuing debate in Congress over the Patients' Bill of Rights, compared to 44% in the May/June HNI. When asked what the key issue in the debate has been, 46% correctly answered that it has been about controversy over allowing patients to sue their health insurance plans, nearly twice as many who answered the same question correctly in the May/June HNI (24%). One in seven (14%) mistakenly thought the key issue in the debate has been how much managed care plans can charge patients, and 9% mistakenly thought it has been the privacy of medical records. Thirty percent (30%) said they did not know, fewer than who reported they did not know in the May/June HNI (37%).

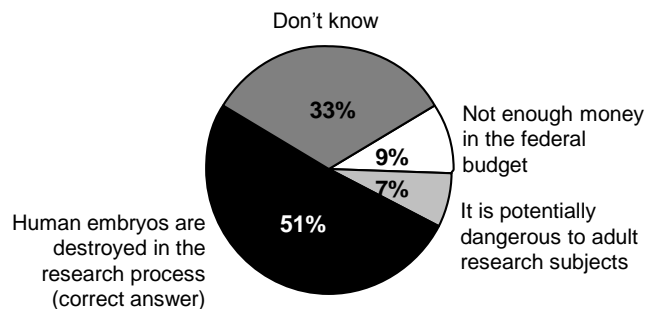
The key issue in the recent debate over Patients' Rights legislation has been...



Stem Cell Research

Over half of Americans (55%) reported that they closely followed news coverage of the debate over federal funding for stem cell research. When asked what the major controversy was, 51% correctly answered that human embryos are destroyed in the research process. Sixteen percent (16%) answered incorrectly, saying the controversy is either that there is not enough money in the federal budget to fund stem cell research (9%), or that the research is potentially dangerous for adult research subjects (7%). One-third (33%) said they did not know what the controversy is.

What is the major reason for the controversy over federal funding for stem cell research?



President Bush's discount prescription drug card plan

Over six in ten Americans (63%) said they closely followed coverage of President Bush's recent proposal to immediately help seniors pay for their prescription drugs. When asked what President Bush proposed, about three in ten (31%) correctly answered that he proposed providing discount cards that would enable seniors to buy prescription drugs at lower prices. Twenty-one percent (21%) thought President Bush had proposed expanding Medicare to include a prescription drug benefit during this period to immediately help seniors, and 7% thought he proposed giving seniors with high prescription drug costs tax credits. Over four in ten Americans (42%) said that they did not know what he proposed.

What did President Bush recently propose to do in order to start immediately helping seniors pay for prescription drugs?

