

The article is from the Boston Daily Globe on September 30th, 1918, titled *Number of grippe deaths fall off*. Two subtitles sets an optimistic tone towards the present and future situation of the flu at the beginning of the text, writing that the health officials believe the situation is improving, and churches are making efforts to fight against the flu. The body goes with a leading part followed by four detailed parts with subtitles. The materials mostly comprised interviews and data from the health department, adding authoritativeness and authenticity to the news.

When this article came out, many places, especially big cities like Boston and New York, faced a severe shortage of personnel supply for flu-related jobs. The urgent demand for medical staff was stressed in the article many times. It was also supported by several reports demonstrating needs for volunteer nurses on the same page ---- for instance, *Red Cross Nurses to Help New England* and *New York Issues Call for Volunteer Nurses*. Besides, the health officials believed the shortage of hospital staff is the primary reason why the flue continues serious. They also suspected that the outbreak in 1918 resulted from large-scale moving troops. Although the war was still the hottest topic in public space, especially on mass media platforms, fear towards the Spanish flu spread widely among citizens since Spanish influenza had already invaded many people's daily lives. An article on page four reports that two patrolmen refused to take influenza patients to the hospital. One of the patrolmen argued that he already had a case in his home, so he would prefer to limit the chance to make things worse. These concerns and actual impacts of the flu on ordinary lives could contribute to the lack of volunteers or assistance working against the Spanish flu.

The article begins with a shortage of nurses and mentions a decrease of three deaths from the previous 24 hours, reaffirming the title with raw numbers. The health commissioner advocates "at-home treatment" for less severe cases if circumstance allows, to ease the tension on health service resources, which sounds familiar to people living in COVID times. In the next part, the commissioner notes that hospital space is sufficient and assumes that influenza's virulence will decrease by time, which is inconsistent with their positive view towards flu control. Meanwhile, he "urged" strong and capable women to volunteer as nurse assistants, reflecting the gender division of labor in the 19th century. The word "urge" conveys a very pressing demand. Note that this is the second time they ask people to help out. Then the news moves to a telegram by Dr. Kelley, who pointed out desperate needs of outside assistance again. He addressed the high morbidity rate of medical staff and assumed it as a cause of a rapidly increasing demand for doctors and nurses. The next subtitle makes a direct call for personnel support: "Doctors and Nurses Needed." "Crying need" is used in the body as the fourth advocacy for volunteers. At the end of the article a table of death data is shown. The report starts by discussing how the "death number" drops compared to the last 24 hours. However, the last part of the news indicates that both death rate and total death are higher than both previous weeks and corresponding weeks last year. This inconsistency seems to be neglected since no relating critique has been found in local

newspapers in the following month. It is reasonable to assume that most ordinary readers would go straight to the conclusion rather than study different forms of data by themselves. Or people did question the accuracy of the argument for incoherent statistic evidence, but the query was not reported on the press. Quantitative evidence should receive more attention from both reporters and readers since the way they are interpreted usually influences the general understanding of the situation. Another thing notable here is that the author put "a decrease in death number" in the title instead of "an increase in death rate." This could be viewed as another attempt to stay with an optimistic expectation on controlling Spanish flu.

Reflections and discussions on Spanish flu materials can help to better understand health policies, social changes, and mass media in the time of Covid-19. It is common that people learn from the past and react with the previously applied policies. For instance, "at-home treatment" is mentioned in both periods to mediate pressure on health services. There is also something different. In the Spanish flu period, the government primarily focused on calling for help from professionals and volunteers to alleviate the medical workforce shortage and fight against the flu. In COVID times, urgent appeals for physical and mental protections and support for frontline medical staff keep catching the public's attention. The scope of news reports has expanded as well. The flu-related news report in 1918 focused on death and spreading trends. In 2020, discussions on broader topics such as social justice and mental health rise among Covid-related news. Additionally, in Spanish flu times, both the officials and mainstream press generally held an optimistic tone. Although the printing press industry flourished in the 19th century and people enjoyed numerous news resources, many mass media companies were closely connected with different political parties. Nowadays, more realistic reports on Covid-19 appear from diverse information sources. However, it also means more fake news, especially on the internet. Modern people have a stronger awareness of detecting false information, but this also makes us feel confused about diverse media content to a certain level. People can be vulnerable in a pandemic period featuring overwhelming information --- we may either be suspicious of all information or unconsciously convinced by biased narratives. Overall, media in the digital age has widened the range of social discussions and made up for communications in communities performing social distancing while bringing new challenges with an information boom compared to the printing era.

Reference:

Number of grippe deaths fall off: Outlook improved is view of health officials church services cut short or cut out entirely in greater Boston. (1918, Sep 30). Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922) Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/docview/503544487?accountid=14553>