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**Nothing to Cough At: Framing
Analysis of Media Coverage of the
2012 Florida Tuberculosis Incident**

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Abstract

In April 2012, a cluster of tuberculosis cases affecting Florida became the topic of much news attention. Opinions expressed by the press varied, with some journalists depicting the situation as a failure of the state's health department, and in some instances Governor Rick Scott came under scrutiny. Other journalists took the stance of downplaying the severity of the incident and framing it as a low-level public health concern. Examining the coverage of Florida-based newspapers yielded recurring frames in the articles that were chosen for qualitative content analysis. Following analysis, common frames included failure, blaming, sensationalizing, financial, downplaying, inappropriate handling, reform, and communication.

A qualitative framing analysis of five Florida newspapers was conducted. Findings show that the 2012 tuberculosis outbreak in Florida was primarily framed as a financial issue in news coverage.

Introduction

In March 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention referred to the Florida tuberculosis (TB) outbreak, particularly in Jacksonville, as the worst in 20 years. However, news about the outbreak has been "ignored or suppressed" by the governor's office and pushed forward with plans to close down A.G. Holley Hospital (Seitz-Wald 2012). This outbreak occurred at a time when 43% of Florida voters rated Governor Rick Scott unfavorably (Wallace 2012). With Governor Scott's reelection in the 2014 gubernatorial elections and a great deal of media attention on other contagious diseases such as Ebola, public health and safety continue to be issues on the minds of many Florida voters.

TB is a bacterial infection caused by the germ *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, (Medline Plus n.d.) and primarily affects the lungs, but can also attack any part of the body. TB can affect individuals in developed and developing countries, and although incidents have been decreasing in the United States over time, it is still a viable public health concern globally.

In the summer of 2012, Governor Scott announced a decrease in funding for the state's Department of Health, as well as the decision to close down the state's only TB hospital, A.G. Holley Hospital located in Lantana, Florida. However, these decisions came at a time when the state was experiencing a resurgence of TB cases. After genotyping the bacteria responsible for TB, CDC data and field notes from Duval County yielded "a substantial increase in the percentage of TB cases with the same genotype" (CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2012). Many members of the media criticized Scott for avoiding responsibility and for his lack of prudence in responding to these cases. This criticism caused a

subsequent firestorm in the media, both at the state and national levels.

No scholarly research about the 2012 tuberculosis incident in Florida has been conducted. The purpose of this study is to examine the media coverage of the summer 2012 TB incident using qualitative content analysis. Framing theory is used to explore the various themes and frames used by the media in communicating this issue to the public. Focusing on the content produced and published online by regional newspapers based in Florida yields the most relevant results for examining statewide implications. These implications are important for Floridians and the American public who rely on the news for information regarding health issues. This research was guided by the following research questions: What is the dominant frame found in the articles? How do the media characterize Governor Scott and/or the state government's response or lack of response to the incident? How does framing differ in each newspaper? What sources are quoted the most frequently in the

articles? How do the media frame the closing of the A.G. Holley Hospital?

Tuberculosis facts and symptoms

TB is a “contagious bacterial that involves the lungs, but may spread to other organs” (PubMed Health 2013). At-risk populations include infants, the elderly, and those with weak immune systems (PubMed Health 2013). Risk factors for developing TB include working in an environment where exposure is likely, such as in the medical field, in addition to having poor nutrition and inhabiting a place with unsanitary or subpar living conditions (PubMed Health 2013).

Sizable populations of those infected with TB are also homeless and afflicted with AIDS/HIV. Worldwide, TB is one of the leading causes of death among people living with HIV (CDC 2012). However, it is important to note that not everyone infected with TB becomes sick, due to the fact that TB can remain dormant and inactive for years, which is why there are two types of TB: latent infection and TB disease (CDC 2012).

Symptoms of TB include coughing up mucus or blood, excessive night sweating, fatigue, fever, weight loss, difficulty breathing, wheezing, and chest pain (PubMed Health 2013). In order to test for TB, an individual must either receive a tuberculin skin test or a blood test. If the test comes back positive, it only means the person has been infected—it does not tell physicians anything about what type of infection it is (latent TB infection or full-on TB disease). To find out, the individual must obtain a chest x-ray or sputum sample (CDC 2012). TB can be fatal if not treated properly. Treatment for TB includes prescription medications such as isoniazid, rifampin, and rifapentine (CDC 2012). It is crucial that patients undergoing such treatment take drugs exactly as prescribed and finish the medication—if not, they risk reinfection or bacterial resistance, which are more difficult and expensive to treat (CDC 2012).

TB statistics in the U.S. and Florida

Historically, the number of tuberculosis cases in the United States has been declining for many years. In the mid 1980s, the number of cases

rose nationally until reaching an apex in 1992 (CDC 2011). Case counts began decreasing in 1993, “and 2011 marked the nineteenth year of decline in the total number of TB cases reported in the United States since the peak of the resurgence” (CDC 2011). In the decade of 1992 until 2002, the number of cases decreased at a rate of 5 to 7 percent per year. In the U.S., most people recover from primary TB infection without further complications—however, the infection may stay dormant for years and reactivate (PubMed Health 2013).

In Florida, there were 825 TB cases reported in 2010. This figure represents a 1.7% increase in cases since 2009 (FDOH 2010). Of these cases, 64% were males—half were U.S. born, and half foreign born. Of these, 33% were aged 25-44 and 35% aged 45-64. The majority was white, non-Hispanic (FDOH 2010). By county, Miami-Dade had the highest instances, in the range of 87-154 cases in 2010. Following closely with a range of 34-86 cases were Broward, Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Orange, and Duval counties (FDOH 2010).

From 1994 to 2011, the number of TB cases in Florida decreased overall from 1,764 cases per year in 1994 to 753 cases in 2011 (FDOH 2011). Although the number of TB cases has been on a downward decline from 1994 until 2010, some members of the media are still referring to the 2012 outbreaks as the worst in 20 years (Singer 2012a; Luscombe 2012). According to the CDC’s April 5 report, Florida “was suffering one of the largest uncontained TB outbreaks in 20 years—and the largest spike nationwide—resulting in 13 deaths and 99 illnesses, mostly among the homeless” (Patton 2012).

A.G. Holley Hospital

A.G. Holley Hospital, located in Lantana, Florida, was one of a few federally funded hospitals in Florida and the only tuberculosis hospital in the state when it closed in summer 2012. Additionally, it was “the nation’s last freestanding tuberculosis hospital” (Pensa 2005). Four state-funded TB hospitals were built between 1938 and 1952 as a response to the influx of affected patients and the need for sanatoriums. A.G. Holley opened in 1950 with a 500-bed capacity that

included living quarters for physicians, nurses, and staff. Patients with “the most difficult cases of TB” and multi-drug resistant strains were often sent there for treatment (University of Virginia Health System n.d.). As medical research surrounding TB advanced and treatments were found, the hospital’s effectiveness decreased until Governor Scott and the Florida government eventually closed it. UF Health Jacksonville and Jackson Memorial in Miami are currently the two hospitals being contracted to treat the would-be A.G. Holley patients (Singer 2012a). Despite the resurgence of TB cases in 2012, Governor Scott cut the Florida Department of Health’s budget. According to some articles, the TB outbreak was happening during the previous Governor Crist’s term (Smith 2012). Dating back to 2008, Crist and his political team knew about a few TB incidents such as an outbreak in a Jacksonville assisted-living facility that killed two people, but chose not to inform the public because they did not think it had spread to the general population (Smith 2012).

Incidence of these TB cases was first discovered in 2009, and the CDC was called in for assistance shortly after (Swisher 2012). Some journalists called the incident a “cover up” and “the largest TB outbreak in 20 years” (Peltier 2012; Singer 2012a). The CDC confirmed it was one of the worst outbreaks of TB anywhere in the U.S. for at least two decades (Luscombe 2012). Lawmakers in the state called for Scott to create a panel to investigate the epidemic, but Scott’s administration “either ignored or suppressed news of the outbreak, and it rushed ahead with plans to close the TB hospital as local officials kept information about the outbreak from the public” (Seitz-Wald 2012). Scott’s administration blamed the press for “inaccuracies” in reporting and claimed that the administration involved community stakeholders in order to contain the spread of disease (Weinstein 2012).

Framing theory

Framing is the process whereby the news media presents an issue to the public, thus influencing and shaping their opinions and responses to such issues (Tewksbury and Scheufele

2008). Framing is important because media frames can influence and contribute to the ways the public understand an issue (Hertog and McLeod 2001). With roots in both psychology and sociology, framing theory is “based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences” (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007: 11). Particularly crucial in this case is the intersection of media framing with politics: “News frames affect attitudes by stressing specific values, facts, or other considerations and endowing them with greater relevance to an issue that under an alternative frame” (de Vreese 2010: 46).

Public health issues can be framed in a variety of ways. It is important to note that framing public health issues is “complicated and difficult in part because it involves the issue of race, one of the most difficult topics to discuss in the United States” (Dorfman 2010: 24). It is also important to note that in many health issues, underlying political tensions and power struggles amongst stakeholders are defining issues.

There are two types of news frames: thematic and episodic frames (Iyengar 1994). Thematic frames focus on trends over time in a longitudinal sense, focusing on an issue (Iyengar 1994). Conversely, episodic frames emphasize individual cases and discontinuous events by focusing on a single event or individual (Iyengar 1994). Coverage of the TB incident can be viewed as mostly episodic, as journalists would cover specific cases and clusters as they occurred, but would also cite that these incidences were due to long-term inaction or mishandling on the part of the Florida government.

Although framing theory is often applied when discussing politics, it plays an integral role in the news and media sphere. “Framing theory argues that news frames function to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event. In fact, news frames can exert a relatively substantial influence on citizens’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors” (Tewksbury and Scheufele 2008: 19). This level of control and power can have particularly important implications for the presentation of issues relating to health and public

safety. News organizations have a great responsibility when it comes to the way in which they deliver or disseminate messages about potential issues of public health, such as a disease outbreak. Often, the media faces a conundrum when deciding how to report the news: depicting such an event as one of minimal concern may cause people to ignore warning signs or engage in risky behaviors; while exaggerating the direness of an event may cause unnecessary alarm.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the dominant frame found in the articles?

RQ2: How do the media characterize Governor Rick Scott and/or the state government's response or lack of response to the incident?

RQ3: How does framing differ based on each newspaper?

RQ4: What sources are quoted the most frequently in the articles?

RQ5: How do the media frame the closing of the A.G. Holley Hospital?

Method

A qualitative framing analysis was conducted to survey the media coverage of Florida's tuberculosis

outbreak from the time of occurrence in April 2012 until August 2012. Qualitative content analysis "is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way" (Schreier 2012: 1). The advantage of qualitative research is the ability to perform systematic analysis in a "flexible" manner (Schreier 2012: 5). Additionally, it focuses on "latent meaning, meaning that is not immediately obvious" (Schreier 2012: 15).

Framing analysis was chosen because it allowed for the investigation into the ways in which journalists from various media outlets presented the TB incident to the public, and how they portrayed Governor Scott and the state government's response. Since no prior study of this kind has been completed, there were no a priori (preexisting) codes to use from the literature. Thus, an inductive approach (where codes are developed by the researcher as he/she completes the coding process) to framing was taken with the goal of investigating from all angles the messages that journalists disseminated to the public.

During framing analysis, online news articles from the websites of Florida-based publications were used, as most Americans obtain their political news from the Internet and mobile devices (Mitchell and Rosenstiel 2012). Furthermore, more people than ever are obtaining their news from online sources—in fact, half of all adults in the United States have a mobile connection to the Internet, whether it is through a smartphone or tablet (Mitchell and Rosenstiel 2012). Additionally, about 46 percent of Americans own a smartphone—many of whom are using it to follow news. “News remains an important part of what people do on their mobile devices—64% of tablet owners and 62% of smartphone owners say they use the devices for news at least weekly” (Mitchell and Rosenstiel 2012).

The TB issue has implications reaching beyond Florida, as national media outlets such as *Forbes*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Slate Magazine*, and *The Huffington Post* reported on the incident. Many readers across the U.S. may have sought out the websites of Florida-based newspapers to obtain

more regionally focused information. Interested entities may have also sought more information through an Internet search engine such as Google or Bing, and many of the results retrieved by these search engines are web links to articles from the websites of Florida-based newspapers.

These publications have been chosen based on geographic location to cover all major regions of the state: *The Miami Herald* (Southeast Florida), *The Palm Beach Post* (Southeast Florida), *The Tampa Bay Times/St. Petersburg Times* (West Central Florida), *The Orlando Sentinel* (Central Florida), *The Florida-Times Union* (North/Northeast Florida). *The Tallahassee Democrat* and *Pensacola News Journal* were chosen to represent the Panhandle area, but access to the articles from these newspapers was not available on the Access World News database or without a paid subscription. Articles were obtained from Access World News database using the search term “tuberculosis” in all fields and text and a custom date range of April 1, 2012 until August 31, 2012. There were 78 total results. After articles were screened to match the predetermined

criteria, there were 42 total results. There was a 100-word minimum for articles so that there would be adequate text to analyze for themes and codes. Obituaries, classifieds or other unrelated sections were excluded.

After an appropriate sample was obtained, a simple random sample of 10 percent of the articles were read and coded by a journalism graduate student who was trained in the methodology and coding guidelines. The researcher and coder read the articles and completed a detailed coding worksheet to examine: newspaper name; publication date; byline; story length (in words); section where article appeared (i.e. news, feature); title/headline; main idea; secondary idea; sources directly quoted or paraphrased; and frames identified. In order to handle coding discrepancies, the researcher and co-coder discussed frames and codes until agreement was reached. Changes and additions to the coding sheet and guide were made following the consultation with co-coder until there was an acceptable agreement. Using Holsti's method, intercoder

reliability was calculated at 0.91. The "cycle of comparison" (Boeije 2002: 393) was repeated several times in this research until the frames reached a point of saturation in which the information found in the articles "can be easily assigned to one of the already existent categories" developed by the researcher.

Results

The final sample (n=42) consisted of 24 articles from *The Palm Beach Post*, two articles from *The Miami Herald*, 12 articles from *The Florida Times-Union*, two articles from *The Tampa Bay Times*, and two articles from *The Orlando Sentinel*. The average word count for these articles was 752. The shortest article contained 170 words and the longest contained 2,188 words. All 42 articles were original and contained bylines. All articles were written and published in 2012, with three published in April; none published in May; six published in June; 29 published in July, and four published in August. The database used did not specify the section in which all of the articles originally appeared; for those that were specified, they mostly appeared in

news; local & business, and editorial/opinion columns. Fourteen of 42 articles were 1A stories; the rest appeared in prominent locations in print, such as 13 in the A section and 12 in the B section. One article appeared in section P, and the locations of the two articles from *The Miami Herald* were unspecified.

Frames found in the articles included: failure, blaming, sensationalizing, financial, downplaying, handled inappropriately, reform, and communication. Within these frames were sub-hierarchical categories. For example, the communication frame often included total lack of communication; miscommunication; and/or lack of transparent communication as sub-themes. The failure frame included any mention or suggestion of failure—whether it was by the governor, Florida Department of Health, or state Surgeon General.

RQ1: What is the dominant frame found in the articles?

The dominant frame was financial—present in 93% of the articles (n=39). Many journalists cited the extremely high cost of treating TB patients,

especially for those with multi-drug resistant strains. According to a *Palm Beach Post* article from June 2, treatment for those with multi-drug resistant strains can cost up to \$274,000. Other articles cited the cost of keeping A.G Holley Hospital open. According to many articles, Florida needs more money to treat the TB incident. A *Florida Times-Union* article from August 9, 2012 said the estimated cost for treating TB in Duval County is \$425,000:

The fiscal years, except for 2008-09, all ended in a deficit, and when combined was more than \$400,000. Jessica Hammonds, spokeswoman for the state’s health department, said alternate forms of funding are used to balance the budget each year, but the source of the money was not made clear. (Jones 2012).

According to state Surgeon General John Armstrong, costs to treat the Jacksonville strain (FL 046) would be incurred by the state, and it could afford to pay. However, many articles cited the fact that the state filed for a

supplemental grant from the CDC worth \$250,000 on July 17, 2012.

The next dominant frame was sensationalizing, appearing in 76%; n=32 articles. For example, a July 19, 2012 *Times-Union* article depicted the cluster as a race/poverty issue and called for reform—in addition to citing a failure to communicate and blaming the state for failing to protect the homeless: “Most were either in homeless shelters or had spent time on the streets. Half were male. Three-fourths were black... ‘This is huge... This is the largest outbreak I’ve ever heard of’” (Weathersbee 2012).

Another prominent frame was communication (n=30; 71%) or the lack thereof. Many journalists expressed frustration, confusion, and in some cases, outrage regarding the lack of communication and transparency from the state. Also within the communication frame was the sub category of miscommunication. Many journalists felt that mistakes had been made when the state was not forthcoming and honest with the media about the

incident, like in a *Florida Times-Union* article from July 22, 2012:

While health officials, law enforcement, staff, at homeless shelters and some others knew of the growing TB cluster and were working to contain it, the general public was not aware of the problem or of the CDC’s investigations until the *Times-Union* published a front-page story about the CDC’s findings on June 5.

Almost all of the articles referred to the situation as an “outbreak.” Many cited the information from the CDC report—that it was dubbed the “largest TB outbreak in the country” or the “worst” that CDC officials had seen in 20 years. According to many articles, the state government failed to be transparent with Floridians and the greater public about the state of the TB situation—not just with the presence of the incident, but with how much it could potentially cost to treat these patients. Many articles cited taxpayers’ money that would fund these treatments, and thus were disapproving of such a lack of transparency and communication. It

was cited in articles from *The Palm Beach Post* and *The Florida Times-Union* that Florida Surgeon General John Armstrong kept “information to limited groups.” According to the same *Florida Times-Union* article published on July 22, 2012, “Broad public outreach should have started three years ago when CDC assistance was requested and federal grants were being applied for and received” (“Minimal TB outreach was a bad policy” 2012).

The aforementioned excerpt also fit into the failure and blaming frames—failure to communicate and handle the situation appropriately, and the journalist blaming the Governor and Florida government. Journalists blamed the state and Governor Scott for not reacting in a timely manner when there was a resurgence of cases, which means they thought it was not handled appropriately.

The downplaying frame (present in 28 articles; 67%) usually appeared in the form of quotes from various federal officials who maintained the stance that the cluster was contained, such as in the same *Times-Union* article

from July 22: “Armstrong, who took the helm as surgeon general in May, defended keeping the information to limited groups ‘so we don’t create unnecessary fear and anxiety’ in the general population” (“Minimal TB outreach was a bad policy” 2012). Concurrently present with the downplaying frame was suggestion by journalists that the incident was handled inappropriately. Many writers like *Times-Union’s* Tonyaa Weathersbee provided ideas for reform, such as Jacksonville investing in another day shelter. Stacey Singer of the *Post* suggested the state government change the way they test and track down homeless individuals for TB testing, in addition to increasing education/awareness: “The coalition members were...educating shelter staff on what to watch for and what to do if a client appeared ill” (Singer 2012a).

RQ2: How do the media characterize Governor Rick Scott and/or the state government’s response or lack of response to the incident?

Many articles characterized Governor Scott as the main reason why the situation was not prevented or

handled more appropriately. In the vast majority of the articles that discussed Scott, there was also discussion of how the state government failed. When Scott and the state government's inaction were discussed, there was presence of the failure and blaming frames. More than half of the articles mentioned Governor Scott directly and attributed the TB incident to a direct failure of his leadership. For example, signing the law to close A.G. Holley despite knowledge of the TB incident was frequently cited. Concurrently, those articles also suggested that the state government failed in some way—whether it was a failure to respond at all, quickly enough, or properly in order to better control the situation. Articles from *The Palm Beach Post* tended to take a more hostile stance toward Scott and the state government in general, but especially when it came to their response to the TB incident. In an article from July 22, *Post* staff writer Michael LaForgia engaged in sensationalizing—"Golden Retreat Shelter Care Center, the Jacksonville assisted-living home that spawned the largest tuberculosis outbreak in recent American history."

He went on to depict the unsanitary conditions of the center:

Year after year, state inspectors filled reports with disturbing observations: crowded, stinking rooms; spaces strewn with fouled linen and urine-soaked mattresses; crumbling ceilings and stuck fire-exit doors; medication errors and incomplete health assessments; failures to ensure contagious diseases weren't spread (LaForgia 2012).

Due to media messages that seem to be at odds with one another, it is difficult to discern who is being completely transparent with the truth and who is taking artistic liberty with the details. However, fear mongering seemed to be a common code within *Post* articles. For example, in one article titled "State inaction reckless," Rhonda Swan writes: "the Florida Department of Health failed in its mission when the agency kept secret from the general public a tuberculosis outbreak in Duval County." There was also a feeling of camaraderie among the newspapers, as all of them expressed some degree of confusion

and disappointment with the lack of transparency with which the state government handled the situation. According to articles from *The Florida Times-Union* and *Palm Beach Post*, the state government tried to hide the “outbreak” from the media, while “press releases paint a ‘happy face’ on a potential statewide outbreak,” according to *Palm Beach Post* guest writer Marc J. Yacht, M.D. (Yacht 2012).

Downplaying was present in 28 articles (67%). When quoted, federal officials and state workers depicted the cluster as contained and said there was no public health risk associated with the cases. Journalists quoted state Surgeon General John Armstrong 24% of the time—for example, in a July 17 article by *Times-Union* writer Tracy Jones: “We are undaunted by the challenges, and we’re going to close this loop,” Armstrong said. “Our community is not at risk for tuberculosis.” According to the state’s Deputy Health Secretary, the “outbreak” was just an epidemic among homeless men in the Jacksonville area. He maintained this stance throughout the time frame in

which articles were analyzed for the purposes of this research. According to another quote from state Surgeon General Armstrong, “it is nearly impossible to catch TB simply by passing an infected person on the street. To be at risk, you must be exposed to the organisms constantly, by living or working in close quarters with someone who has the active disease.” State officials such as state Deputy Health Secretary Harris reiterated that this incident was not a threat to public health and safety. However, journalists painted an entirely different picture of the situation. Clearly each article expressed widely differing opinions and presented information, facts, statistics and numbers in a way that bolstered the journalist’s argument. As a Florida resident or member of the public, it can be extremely difficult to sift through all of the conflicting media messages in order to better understand the level of risk associated with this TB incident.

RQ3: How does framing differ in each newspaper?

Of the five newspapers analyzed, 57% of the sample size was comprised of

articles from *The Palm Beach Post*. Articles from the *Post* were characterized by greater disapproval of the way in which the TB incident was handled. Journalists, particularly the editorial staff of the *Post*, were extremely outspoken against the state and what they frequently referred to as “recklessness” and “inaction” on the part of Governor Scott. Headlines were more critical and articles were prominently featured as 1A stories or published in the A section. Examples included headlines such as: “Worst TB Outbreak in 20 years kept secret” by Stacey Singer, “State Inaction Reckless” by Rhonda Swan, and “Release is Health Risk” by Rhonda Swan. In an article from July 12, Rhonda Swan of *The Post* writes:

how could Dr. Harris [deputy secretary of the Florida Department of Health] characterize what the CDC has called the worst outbreak of TB the agency has assisted with in 20 years as ‘essentially under control?’ The CDC estimates that at least 3,000 individuals have come into close contact with contagious people but have

yet to be evaluated (Swan 2012a).

Articles from *The Florida Times-Union* comprised 29% of the sample size. Articles in the *Times-Union* expressed the same sort of skepticism, disapproval, and at times outrage as the *Post* articles. Many *Times-Union* articles were featured in the B section, so they were not as prominently featured as articles published in *The Post*. However, the articles tended to be more statistically focused— frequently citing numbers and figures relating to the incident without sensationalizing or fear mongering. Journalists from this paper frequently emphasized the lack of communication present throughout the incident:

When state Sen. Audrey Gibson initially asked Armstrong for an estimate for how much money it would take to contain the tuberculosis cluster at the delegation meeting, he declined to answer, saying he wanted to give an exact number... The *Times-Union* also requested the county department’s tuberculosis budgets for each fiscal year since 2007 on July

13. The first budget received by the newspaper only included expenses and revenue received from federal grants and general revenue (Jones 2012).

Of the two articles from *The Miami Herald*, one downplayed the incident and one expressed extreme outrage. John Dorschner's July 24, 2012 article depicted the incident as contained and under control:

With the closing of Florida's only hospital dedicated to tuberculosis, Jackson Memorial has taken all of the state's TB patients that health officials believe need hospitalization — a mere 21. Jackson and county health officials say the transition has gone smoothly, despite reports of a virulent strain of TB in Jacksonville that has received intense publicity (Dorschner 2012).

Writer Fred Grimm's article dated July 11 is editorial in nature, criticizing the "happy-talk press release celebrating the closing of the state's last tuberculosis hospital. As if this were good news." Accusing Governor Scott

and the state of covering up the outbreak's severity, Grimm also cites finances as a key factor:

Last February, even as Duval County was struggling with a burgeoning tuberculosis crisis, our oblivious lawmakers were debating a bill that would massively downsize the Florida Department of Health, cut 12,000 public health jobs, eliminate preventative care and environmental health programs and close Florida's last TB hospital (Grimm 2012).

The two articles from *The Orlando Sentinel* engaged in less sensationalism overall than *The Palm Beach Post*. In an article dated July 18, *Sentinel* staff writer Marni Jameson writes that the new TB strain is "no cause for alarm, officials say." Of the four directly quoted sources present in the article, three are from Department of Health officials, who maintain that the "cluster is contained." According to spokesman for the Orange County Health Department, "all the patients have successfully completed treatment, and no Central Florida counties have seen

any additional active cases of the strain since." Another *Sentinel* article from July 9 called the outbreak "serious" and quoted CDC's Dr. Robert Luo: "The high number of deaths in this outbreak emphasizes the need for vigilant active case finding . . ." Later in the article, it was mentioned that to date, there had been 13 deaths and 99 illnesses. The article presented conflicting messages about the severity of the incident and cited statistics that may suggest otherwise.

Tampa Bay Times had two articles included in the sample, one of which outlined the spread of TB by interviewing Dr. Beata Casanas, USF associate professor of infectious diseases and medical director of the Hillsborough County Health Department's TB center. This article stated facts about the particular strain (FL 046) found in Duval County. Symptoms and treatment were discussed. Another *Times* article from July 31 downplayed the severity of the incident. Staff writer Anna M. Phillips wrote, "At one time, Holley held 500 patients. By the time it closed, there were fewer than 50." She also cited that the number of TB cases in Florida

has been declining in recent years and officials said it is on track to fall further in 2012. According to the state Department of Health, 753 cases were reported in Florida last year, a drop of 10 percent from the previous two years. There have been 284 cases reported so far this year (Phillips 2012).

However, she only included quotes from state officials such as Surgeon General John Armstrong and Dr. Douglas Holt, Hillsborough County health officer, who painted a positive image of the containment effort and maintained that those infected posed no threat to the public.

RQ4: What sources are quoted the most frequently in the articles?

The print articles included in the sample made use of quotes or summarized quotes from Florida Surgeon General John Armstrong, state deputy health secretary Steven Harris, and spokesman for Duval County Health Departments Charles Griggs. The most frequently quoted sources were officials/employees of

the Florida Department of Health (n=23, 55% of articles quoted these officials). The next most-quoted group was legislative members, representatives, senators n=13, 31%). Surgeon General Armstrong was quoted in n=10, 24% of the articles; health secretary Steven Harris was quoted in n=8, 19% of the articles; Duval County Health Department spokesman Charles Griggs was quoted in n=5, 12% of the articles. The CDC was quoted in n=5, 12% of the articles; doctors were quoted n=4, 10%, the homeless were quoted n=5, 12%, and staff members of A.G. Holley Hospital were quoted in one of the articles. Advocacy groups were quoted in n=3, 7% of the articles; members of the general public were quoted in n= 2, 5%, a professor was quoted in one article. Quotes from Dr. Marc J. Yacht also appeared in the articles. Yacht is a retired physician and public health officer who was largely against the closing of A.G. Holley Hospital and disapproved of the way in which the TB incident was handled. Journalists also included quotes from those who could potentially be affected by the

outbreak, such as the homeless residing in Duval County.

RQ5: How do the media frame the closing of the A.G. Holley Hospital?

Sixty percent of the articles discussed the closing of A.G. Holley Hospital. Of those, some framed the hospital's closing as a financial necessity. Others used the downplaying frame to show that closing the hospital was far from detrimental. In an article from July 24, 2012, *Miami Herald* writer John Dorschner depicted the hospital's closing as unimportant—"With the closing of Florida's only hospital dedicated to tuberculosis, Jackson Memorial has taken all of the state's TB patients that health officials believe need hospitalization—a mere 21." Later, he referred to the shut down as a "cost-cutting move" passed by Florida legislature and endorsed by Governor Scott. It cost \$10 million per year to operate A.G. Holley, and many articles cited that it was a wise financial decision to close the hospital despite the state government's knowledge of the outbreak.

On April 5, 2012 a CDC report was sent to Tallahassee regarding the magnitude of the outbreak. According to the report, the Jacksonville outbreak was “one of the worst” that the group had investigated in 20 years. Nine days later, the governor signed papers to close A.G. Holley, “where tough tuberculosis cases have been treated for more than 60 years.” At A.G. Holley, many of the patients who were treated there were also concurrently diagnosed with HIV/AIDS—a difficult population to treat. Another *Palm Beach Post* article discusses the CDC report:

With knowledge of an outbreak that has been responsible for 13 deaths and 99 illnesses, Florida officials buried the report. A.G. Holley, the state’s only tuberculosis hospital, closed July 1 rather than six months later. Health Department action has been questionable and ineffective at best. This outbreak among Jacksonville’s homeless may have exposed several thousand residents, homeless and otherwise (Yacht 2012).

Some articles maintained the idea that closing A.G. Holley was an illogical decision on the part of the state in light of the outbreak, the fact that it was the only remaining TB hospital in Florida, and because it treats the most difficult and comorbid patients, who are usually infected with HIV/AIDS and TB simultaneously.

Discussion

This study examined how the 2012 TB incident was framed in online articles from the websites of Florida-based newspapers. The study sought to identify dominant frames and to investigate the ways in which each newspaper framed the issue. Largely framed as an economic and financial issue, the resurgence of TB cases also exposed what some journalists believed to be failure on the part of the Governor and state government. The lack of news coverage in the larger Florida newspapers (*Miami Herald, Tampa Bay Times*) despite regional outbreaks may have represented an effort by the Florida Department of Health and the Office of the Governor to suppress negative publicity or attention to the incident.

Voters in the 2014 Florida gubernatorial elections chose Rick Scott for a second term as governor despite perceived missteps in his handling of this public health issue. A contentious figure in Florida politics, Governor Scott has been scrutinized for his leadership practices and decisions, and Florida journalists have largely portrayed his handling of the TB incident and closing of A.G. Holley as a failure. Since the 2012 TB incident, there have been other cases in the state—in November 2013, there were two confirmed cases of TB at a Jackson High School in Jacksonville, showing that the problem is still a public health concern affecting Floridians (Piggott 2013).

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Table 1.***Description of Final Sample***

Newspaper	Freq.	Percentage
Florida Times Union	12	28%
Miami Herald	2	5%
Orlando Sentinel	2	5%
Palm Beach Post	24	57%
Tampa Bay Times	2	5%
Total	42	100%

Table 2.***Articles by Publish Date: 2012***

Month	# of articles published	Percentage
April	3	7%
May	0	0%
June	6	14%
July	29	69%
August	4	10%
Total	42	100%

Table 3.***Description of Dominant Frames***

Frame	# of articles	Percentage
Financial	39	93%
Sensationalizing	32	76%
Communication	30	71%
Downplaying	28	67%
Reform	26	62%
Handled	26	62%
Inapprop.		
Failure	23	55%
Blaming	20	48%