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DISCOVERING SCIENCE STORIES: WHAT MAKES THEM NEWS?

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Sometimes it’s obvious that a science story is news and even page 1 news: There’s an important discovery or a large study that ended with important results. But why would a paper like the New York Times decide to put a series of articles on Alzheimer’s on page 1? Or, as it did last year, a series on cancer? Or two years before, a series on Six Killers: the six leading causes of death, familiar culprits like heart disease and strokes, cancer and diabetes? When Gina Kolata, an editor, first came to the Times she said that every story should tell the reader, “Why am I reading this?” and “Why am I reading this now?” So how and why would the Times decide to focus on diseases that are both grim and familiar? And why are those stories news? Ms. Kolata will tell the story behind these stories, explaining why they decided to do the series and how they found things to say that were new and unexpected. She will contrast those stories with some recent breaking news stories, showing why they are different and how both kinds of articles can change the way we think about science and medicine and the nature of scientific evidence.


She was a Pulitzer finalist twice — for investigative reporting in 2000 and for explanatory journalism in 2010. Kolata received an award in 2010 from the Silurian Society, for a series on the war on cancer and from the Associated Press Sorts Editors for writing about the Caster Semenya intersex controversy at the world track championships. In previous years she has won awards from a variety of organizations, including the American Mathematics Society, The American Statistical Society, the American Association of Health Care Journalists, and from the University of Maryland, which gave her a Distinguished Alumnus Award.