Flaunt is not flout, despite their similarity and the tendency to swap them, and a careful writer will observe the distinction.

Flout means "to treat with contemptuous disregard," usually said of rules.¹

Examples:
- Tobacco retailers flouted the requirement to display a "Smoking kills" warning sign.
- The kindhearted aides flouted the rule about birthday treats for patients.

Flaunt means "to display ostentatiously or impudently" or, when used without a direct object, "to display or obtrude oneself to public notice" or "to wave or flutter showily."²

Examples:
- Male birds of paradise flaunt their plumage to attract a mate.
- The press release flaunted the successes of the new therapy.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary also recognizes an emerging usage of flaunt to mean the same as flout: "to treat contemptuously"; however, a usage note after the definition warns that many readers will regard that usage as wrong.² The newest edition of Garner's Modern English Usage similarly advises that this meaning of flaunt be avoided.³ Therefore, in the formal setting of biomedical writing, flaunt and flout should retain their original, separate meanings.
References


--Sarah Bronson, ELS

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