

Education Matters
Advocacy Matters
Support Matters

OAC MEMBERS
MATTER

Finding Purpose from Passion

by Ava Zebrick

OAC Member Ava Zebrick turned her personal journey with weight into a career of improving healthcare for individuals affected by excess weight and obesity — and the OAC served as a great source of motivation along the way.

My Before

By the spring of May 2013, I had finally reached my breaking point. As my orthopedist went over my x-ray results with me, he explained that kneeling for 20 minutes over the weekend had moved my kneecaps out of place.

Luxating patella, or dislocated kneecaps, was added to my growing list of obesity-related conditions — alongside hypertension, prediabetes, polycystic ovarian syndrome, clinical depression and chronic fatigue. I was told that if the physical therapy I was prescribed did not effectively treat my knees, I would need surgery.

The idea of needing weight-related knee surgery was terrifying. I was only 25-years-old at the time, a newlywed and planning to live happily ever after! To me, this crossroads reflected on my overall future. If my obesity wasn't effectively managed, I was facing an imminent health decline with diminishing quality of life and quite possibly, an early death. I became determined to find a solution, and was fortunate to find the best resources and support systems available to help me on my journey.

My During

I spent the next six months of my life researching treatment options for obesity. Ultimately, I decided on the vertical sleeve gastrectomy (VSG) and underwent surgery



Ava Zebrick found passion and inspiration at the 3rd Annual Your Weight Matters National Convention in 2014.

in December 2013. Remarkably, my related conditions rapidly resolved. Within two months, I felt well and energetic enough to be active and to get fit. I dedicated myself to using personal trainers, followed the “Couch to 5K” App routine, participated in running events and even started a group fitness community of my own. I prepared binders full of healthy recipes and even planted an herb and vegetable garden. To maintain this lifestyle, I also regularly attended support group meetings.

During one local support group meeting, an OAC member gave a presentation about an upcoming annual *Your Weight Matters* National Convention in Orlando, Fla. I was instantly inspired and thought attending the convention would be fun, informative and a great aid in keeping my momentum going. I could never have imagined, however, that this convention would mark another huge turning point in my life.

First off, the Convention was fun. I met countless others with similar experiences to mine. They were happy to share their stories, and their journeys provided a source of inspiration for me. Strangers became fast friends, some even lifelong friends, and we had a blast together — whether we were laughing and dancing at the costume party or a hip-hop fitness class.

Of course, the Convention was also educational. During convention breakout sessions, we heard from leading experts in obesity research and care. We learned about mindful eating techniques, non-exercise activity thermogenesis (the burning of calories throughout your daily life), the physiological effects of sugar addiction and so many more fascinating topics. The talk that had the greatest impact on me was a lecture presented by Dr. Arya Sharma called “Why Diets May Not Work: The Complexity of Weight Management.”

Though I had been overweight from a very young age, until the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention and Dr. Sharma’s talk, I had not understood that obesity was in fact a chronic and incurable disease. I had never heard about a “set point” or the odds that were against weight-loss even after bariatric surgery.

Weight management would forever be a great effort, and I learned that individuals most likely to maintain weight-loss are the ones who make their post-surgery “success” a part of their career (e.g., dietitians, personal trainers, bloggers). I took this message to heart and left YWM2014 determined to find such a path for myself — a career in which I could serve others similarly affected by obesity and keep myself focused on health.



Before undergoing bariatric surgery in 2013, Ava faced multiple obesity-related health conditions, and decided it was time for a change.

OAC Membership Application

Why Join the OAC? The OAC is a more than 52,000 member-strong 501(c)(3) National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to the individual affected by the disease of obesity and helping individuals along their journey toward better health through education, advocacy and support. Our core focuses are to raise awareness and improve access to the prevention and treatment of obesity, provide evidence-based education on obesity and its treatments, fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination, elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health and offer a community of support for the individual affected.

1. OAC Membership Categories *(select one)*

- Individual Membership: ~~\$20/year~~ \$10!
- Institutional Membership: \$500/year
- Chairman’s Council Membership: \$1000+/year

Are you joining for the first time, or are you renewing your OAC Membership?

- I am joining for the first time *(never been an OAC member)*.
- I am renewing my membership *(have joined the OAC in the past)*.

*\$10 memberships available for a limited time

2. Donation Add-on

Add-on Donation: Make a General Donation

Make a tax-deductible donation to the OAC when joining as a member. Your donation helps the OAC’s educational and advocacy efforts.

- \$5
- \$50
- \$10
- \$100
- \$25
- Other _____

3. Membership/Donation Add-on Totals:

Membership Fee: +\$ _____

Donation Add-on *(optional)*: +\$ _____

TOTAL PAYMENT: \$ _____

Payment Information

- Check (payable to the OAC) for \$ _____
- Credit card for my TOTAL, including add-ons, of \$ _____
 - Discover® Credit Card Number: _____
 - MasterCard® Expiration Date: _____
 - Visa® Billing Zip Code: _____
 - Amex® CV Code: _____

Contact Information

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____

JOIN ONLINE! To join the OAC online, please visit www.ObesityAction.org and click on the “Get Involved” tab.

Mail: OAC
 4511 North Himes Ave. Ste. 250
 Tampa, FL 33614

Fax: (813) 873-7838

My After

My determination transformed into a purpose — the advancement of obesity research and access to care. I returned to my alma mater, the University of New Orleans, to pursue a master's degree in healthcare management. I will graduate in December of this year with my MBA.

In addition to focusing on school, I am also connecting with various local players in the field of obesity research. I am serving on the project management committee for a study on obesity at Pennington Biomedical Research Center. I am also a patient engagement consultant for the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI).

At LPHI, I am creating orientation materials for fellow patients who will serve as partners on study boards. Once these patient partners are actively participating in the roles, I will act as their liaison. Board members can call me if issues arise—be they logistical or personal—to ensure that the patient voice informs research at every step of the process. This work has led to other projects, such as facilitating training for medical school students on patient-centered outcomes research, and participating in a series of meetings to define obesity-related research questions of interest for local healthcare systems.

The more actively involved I become, the more motivated I feel. I had left YWM2014 asking, “What do I do now?” but I returned one year later feeling completely empowered, and asking myself, “How can I do my best?”

The 2015 Convention provided the same abundance of fun and information, but this time I paid more attention to the OAC's mission and advocacy work by participating in the OAC's National Advocacy Training Session. I knew I wanted to tie in my passion with the OAC's efforts, and I left the advocacy training feeling more capable than ever. Today, when the OAC sends out Action Alert emails, I know I am ready.

Today, I am pursuing all opportunities for involvement. After YWM2015, I applied to serve on the OAC's Access to Care and Revenue Generation Committees. I am also connecting with The Obesity Society's Regional Advocacy Coordinator, the Louisiana Health Communities Coalition, and the Louisiana Obesity Prevention and Management Commission. I hope to bring the powerful patient voice in alliance with the work of researchers, clinicians, policy makers, health systems, business interests and the general public. I believe my work with these networks is the best way to do so.

The OAC has genuinely changed my life, and I know it can change the lives of so many others. I cannot wait to see what this year's convention in Washington, DC has in store for us!

**Get the details to join us for YWM2016 —
read more about the convention on page 22!**



Ava poses with fitness instructor Robanne Robin and Catrina Johnson after a hip-hop fitness class at the Your Weight Matters National Convention.

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ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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