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January 26, 2012

Neal D. Barnard, MD
President
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
5100 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Ste.400
Washington DC, 20016

Dear Dr. Barnard,

We are contacting you today on behalf of the more than 33,000 members of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). It has recently come to our attention that the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) launched a new billboard campaign highlighting the effects of dairy on obesity in Albany, NY. While the Web page hosted on the PCRM site at <http://pcrm.org/media/news/fat-focused-billboards-warn-albany-cheese> discusses the impact of obesity on upstate New Yorkers and highlights the health impact of dairy products, the images portrayed on the billboards may instead perpetuate weight bias and reinforce negative societal attitudes toward persons affected by obesity.

The OAC is concerned with the content and imagery of individuals depicted as headless and pinching their body fat used in the PCRM billboards. The images purposely depict unflattering portrayals of the bodies of obese persons in way that seem intended to evoke reactions of disgust. Individuals affected by obesity find themselves the target of widespread weight bias and stigma in many settings such as employment, healthcare, schools and more. There are lasting consequences of weight-based stigma and prejudice, which lead to numerous psychological and physical health consequences and reduce quality of life for both children and adults affected by obesity. For New Yorkers, your campaign may raise their awareness of dairy products (specifically cheese in this case), but it may also deter them from changing their behaviors because of the messaging and imagery used.

The OAC would be pleased to offer you some suggestions regarding media guidelines and obesity and an example of another state-based campaign tackling the obesity epidemic through nutrition awareness. The Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity provides a great resource, titled "Guidelines for the Portrayal of Obese Persons in the Media," which can be found here www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/media/MediaGuidelines_PortrayalObese.pdf. In addition, the city of Philadelphia has launched a campaign targeting sugary beverages that uses balanced imagery and messaging when addressing the public. To view this campaign, please visit www.foodfitphilly.org. We hope that this information helps PCRM tailor their campaign to the needs of New Yorkers while respecting those affected by the disease of obesity.

On behalf of all OAC members, we respectfully request that you no longer use the current billboard content and imagery, and modify the campaign's language to avoid stigmatizing those affected by obesity. Again, we thank you for your efforts in raising public awareness; however, we must raise awareness with the sensitivity of all individuals in mind. If you would like to discuss this issue or the issue of weight bias and stigma with me personally, please feel free to contact me at our National office at (800) 717-3117.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Joseph Nadglowski in black ink.

Joseph Nadglowski
OAC President and CEO

Handwritten signature of Pamela R. Davis in black ink.

Pamela R. Davis, RN, CBN
OAC Chairman of the Board

Handwritten signature of Rebecca Puhl in black ink.

Rebecca Puhl, PhD
Chair, OAC Weight Bias Committee