

Education Matters
Advocacy Matters
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OAC MEMBERS
MATTER

My Story:

Leading an OAC-Inspired Life

by Tammy Farrell, CPA, CGMA, CFE, ELI-MP

I knew the day would come. It's one all parents both celebrate and fear – the first day of kindergarten. I first became a mom after 40, so my oldest going to kindergarten was a huge deal for me. Besides the normal flood of emotions and the excitement of my baby starting school, kindergarten had another major significance for me. It was my line in the sand.

I knew even when my boys were babies that I needed to conquer my weight problem by the time they were in kindergarten. I imagined sitting at the tiny little desks during meetings with the teacher. I wanted to be healthy enough to go on field trips without a care, run after my kids with forgotten backpacks, and to have lunch at the tables in the cafeteria without worry about how I looked or if I would even fit.

For me, my son Cole starting kindergarten was the point where I knew that it was time to savor life and all the fun times ahead. I didn't want to deal with my excess weight any longer, let alone deal with all the problems it caused or would cause in the future.

In 2011, I was feeling fine when I got some kind of bug that turned my insides out. I had an exhausting afternoon, but I noticed that despite the illness, I felt really good. I felt light, and it seemed easier to breathe. For the first time in a very long time, I experienced what it was like to feel relieved of my excess weight and the fullness that accompanied it. It was time to talk with my doctor about managing my weight.

As an admittedly obsessive researcher, I first went to the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) Web site when learning about surgeries. Frankly, I had been shocked that it was an option for me. My body mass index was just below 40, and I knew that I wouldn't likely lose 100 pounds, which I had thought was the criteria for bariatric surgery. As I learned



more through all the nutrition, emotional, and educational support I received from the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Scottsdale, Ariz., I evolved into being an advocate for spreading the word about what a healthier life could mean to people.

On the OAC's Web site, I began reading articles about personal struggles with obesity, statistics that were nerve-racking to me as a mother, and the many things that OAC members were doing. Stories like the one about an insurance company requiring IQ tests before approving bariatric surgeries and that of another advocacy organization posting blatantly offensive billboards were shocking to me. I'm rarely one to sit on my hands, so I wasn't surprised when various ideas began rolling through my head.

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In May 2012, I had a vertical sleeve gastrectomy (VSG), and I was on the honeymoon high of achieving goal after goal. I began to work on the career transition that I had been putting off for years. I felt the freedom from my weight challenge starting to lift, and it

was time for me to start addressing some of the things I had put into the “If I were thin, I’d [take on the world].” category.

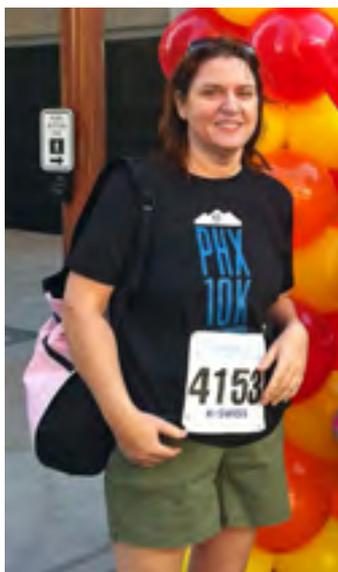


My VSG honeymoon had many great points,

Tammy, her sons and her mother try ostrich fishing in Tucson, Ariz.

but I faced challenges along the way. With the encouragement and support of Lisa Galper, PsyD; the Mayo Clinic Bariatric Support group run by Tonya Benjamin, RN, CNP; and continuing to get support through the OAC articles, it all kept me strong and determined. I began my transition from being a Fortune 500 CPA to becoming an entrepreneur and getting certified as a professional coach through the Institute of Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC). I could do anything now, right?

In August 2013, I had the good fortune of having the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention hosted locally in Phoenix. I was so impressed! The speakers were amazing. My fellow participants were open and welcoming, and the *Walk from Obesity* on Sunday morning was refreshing and uplifting. Attending the Convention truly motivated me to continue on the path I was taking.



Tammy poses for a picture while participating in the Phoenix 10k.

It was great to be among so many people at the Convention who cared deeply about obesity sensitivity and its associated health concerns. I had the pleasure of being able to attend one of the Lunch with the Experts sessions and enjoyed researcher and registered dietician Molly Gee, MEd, RD, LD, sharing her tips and wisdom on living healthy with diabetes and excess weight. She was relaxed, approachable and definitely an expert!

The inspiration I received from attending the Convention cemented my decision to specialize my coaching practice in

bariatrics. My own post-surgery stress appeared when I was being recognized continually for my weight-loss instead of for the cost savings initiatives I spearheaded. While I certainly appreciated the weight-loss support, it was an unexpected blow to me to have that eclipse my professional contributions.

The OAC models many of the things I've integrated into my coaching practice, Believe In Action Coaching. My personal philosophy of being passionately behind a cause involves doing my P.A.R.T. in advocating for obesity awareness.

Prevention

With having two young children, childhood obesity is of particular concern to me. In conjunction with offering healthy food and activity choices in my own home, I also support and encourage the work of the Mollen Foundation and am working to get their program implemented into my children's elementary school.

Awareness

Publishing articles is a way that I integrate public education on obesity into my life. My latest article, "Childhood Obesity: Kids Need SPACE", can be found on www.GreatCoachingTips.com. I also keep in touch with iPEC's 7th Level Wellbeing Division™, which brings health and wellness programs into the corporate and non-profit workplace. They also promote spreading information to the public on obesity and other health related issues.

Research

While I've always been an advocate of research on the subject of obesity, I'm excited to have been recently accepted as a study participant! My study is being conducted by ASU researcher and doctoral student Lisa L. Smith on the effect of meditative movement on bariatric patients who have experienced weight regain. I'm not thrilled to be in the weight regain category (12 pounds), but I am glad that there are studies like this going on to support bariatric patients a year or more after their surgeries.

Treatment

I host free community workshops to help de-mystify and de-stigmatize bariatric surgery and to provide a forum for people to feel comfortable having their questions and concerns addressed by someone who's been there (see the "Events" section of my Web site, BelieveInAction.com). I allow for space where people can contemplate surgery aloud without there being any judgment about their choices, any facilities or doctors they choose to use, or whether the timing is right for them.

My youngest son Casen is now in kindergarten, and I'm thrilled that I crossed that line in the sand two years ago. I have the energy, excitement and health that I had only dreamed of, and I'm grateful for the support and guidance that I've received from the OAC, members of my community and my health teams. When you want the best for yourself, your kids and your community, taking steps toward it can become a natural part of life.

What one step can you take to do your PART?



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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