

Education Matters
Advocacy Matters
Support Matters

OAC MEMBERS
MATTER

MY STORY:

How OAC Invited Me, Encouraged Me, and Gave Me a Way to REACH OUT!

by Walter Medlin, MD, FACS

I didn't know who "Fat Albert" was when I arrived at the party for second grade at my new school, but the taunt rang out clearly when I arrived. I didn't know anyone yet and felt immediate shame – my earliest memory of the negative image of obesity. Call it teasing, bullying or discrimination, but most of us who are heavy have dealt with more than our share. Obesity is not completely unique, and the amount and intensity varies, but few escape without some emotional scarring. It kept me in a shell, and didn't stop even in job interviews for surgical training programs after medical school, even in work with other caregivers.

Later in life, bariatric surgery became a part of my journey. Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) brings purpose and community to my experience with both parts of this disease. Living with obesity can be lonely with or without surgery. Most of us respond to vulnerability by protecting ourselves – We stop **reaching out**.

My relationship with the OAC started simply with me joining. I filled out a card and probably it was even my wife who wrote the check for just basic membership. I am not blessed with being a "natural joiner," but throughout a few years, I got to know OAC leaders just by showing up at the OAC's mixer reception at the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery's annual surgery conference and by using OAC materials for my patients.



I happened to have a family member in the Washington, DC, area; I thought it might be helpful to try tagging along on one of the legislative visits. I met Chris Gallagher, OAC Policy Consultant, and several members on an OAC Day on the Hill visit. I learned that simply telling our story, just showing up, is all we need to do to be effective. Even if it is hard to see the immediate impact, the language and tone of the discussion changes steadily



Walter Medlin, MD, takes a break from hiking to pose for a picture with his dog, Dudley.

Just two months post-surgery, Dr. Medlin catches some waves.



throughout time. Most public servants want to understand and want to make and support good policy.

OAC reclaims our dignity by speaking out. It gives us a platform to call-out bias in the media, in popular culture ignorance and in public policy. As many groups before us learned, bigotry often hides behind the excuses, “I don’t agree with this policy, but I can’t help change things.” OAC fights friendly, but persistently, through the actions of its members in a variety of ways.

OAC encourages us to reach out to each other. I am so thankful to those who lead our social movement including Michelle Vicari (Eggface), Beth Sheldon Badore (Melting Mama) and so many others. Just look up #nsv for a lift! *Your Weight Matters*SM Magazine is always inspiring and educational. Inspired by the efforts of these folks, I learned to leave my comfort zone to try to make a difference with their encouragement. I have learned to blog a bit, to Tweet even! I dipped my toe into writing for *Your Weight Matters*SM Magazine once, and then was shocked to see they liked it! So, I kept saying “yes” when asked. Why not? – they are all so supportive and appreciative of my clunky efforts. I was challenged to help out at the *Your Weight Matters*SM Inaugural Convention in Dallas, and I learned so much from that. We are really ALL growing together!

I have benefited directly, but I see many others in even greater need of OAC for support. That keeps me motivated and focused for this organization to grow. Many of my patients are suffering far more emotionally than they are medically. In my practice, all of our surgical patients are offered OAC membership because I truly believe that it is indispensable for quality of life after bariatric surgery.

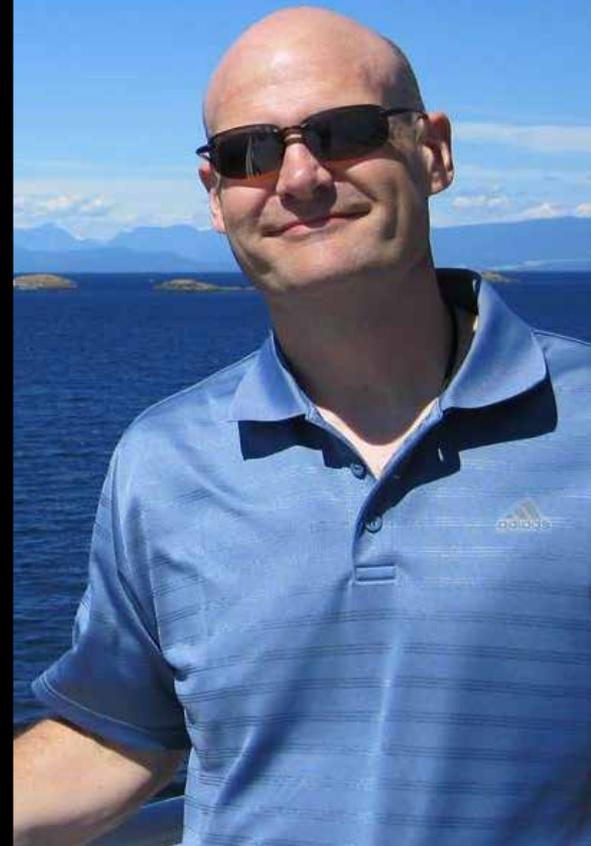
Even more importantly, those who have no access to care are desperate for hope. OAC has won many victories, and provides great resources to help change policy and correct so many misconceptions that can lead to bad policy at the employer level,

the FDA, our federal government, and even in that most important arena of public opinion.

Our great nation does not have a monopoly on justice, but I am honored to be a part of an organization that follows the examples of great American movements for civil rights regarding race, gender, age equality and equal care for those with mental health and HIV issues. We stand on great shoulders!

I often say, the word **ACTION** in the OAC's name is so important! We are all needed in this effort to make a difference. Follow your heart, and do what you do well for the benefit of all in our community. Please, **REACH OUT** in your own way. You will find empowerment and fulfillment beyond your greatest hopes – I surely have. Thanks OAC!

Dr. Medlin poses for a picture while visiting Tofino in Canada.





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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