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Jason D. Hickey, MD
Deputy Commissioner
Bureau of TennCare
310 Great Circle Road
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Deputy Commissioner Hickey:

I am writing to introduce you to the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and urge you to reconsider the proposed exclusion of bariatric surgery in TennCare.

The OAC is a new non-profit patient organization dedicated to educating and advocating for those affected by obesity. It is our mission to elevate and empower those affected by obesity through education, advocacy and support. By strictly representing the interests and concerns of obese patients, the OAC is a unique organization.

Obesity is a serious health epidemic that targets more than 30 percent of Americans and nearly 23 percent of Tennessee's residents. Those affected by obesity often experience or are at a much higher risk for a variety of obesity-related illnesses including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, respiratory problems and some cancers (endometrial, breast and colon).

For the morbidly obese (those more than 100 pounds overweight), bariatric surgery (also known as weight-loss surgery or gastric bypass) is a life-saving and life-changing experience. Scientific evidence proves that bariatric surgery extends the lives of patients, causes significant weight loss, reduces or resolves nearly all of the obesity-related illnesses listed above and tremendously increases quality of life. In addition, bariatric surgery is cost-effective. With the reduction or elimination of the many obesity-related illnesses, long-term health costs are greatly reduced and studies have shown that prescription medication costs alone decrease 70 percent or more post-surgery.

Eliminating access to bariatric surgery is short-sighted as it will not only hurt the morbidly obese residents of Tennessee by denying them access to this life-saving therapy but ultimately will increase the tax dollars required to fund treatment of future obesity-related illnesses. The OAC respectfully requests that you remove the proposed exclusion of bariatric surgery from TennCare. The OAC stands ready to assist TennCare in developing a program that ensures patients receive safe and effective obesity treatments. Your support in this matter would be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information, specific scientific studies to confirm the details presented above or be of assistance on any other obesity-related issues. I can be reached via phone at (800) 717-3117 or via e-mail at jnadglowski@obesityaction.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski".

Joseph Nadglowski Jr.
President & CEO