

Education Matters
Advocacy Matters
Support Matters

OAC MEMBERS
MATTER

LEARNING TO DISCOVER MY VOICE



by Debera Gau



I decided in that moment not to take my health for granted and take control. And my journey began. ”

When asked to share why and how I became involved with the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and why this organization is important to me, I really had to take time to reflect on that.

On the surface, it seemed simple enough – the OAC’s values and mission reflect my own. As a person affected by obesity, I am passionate about providing education, support, acceptance and advocacy for this disease. It’s important to me that this information comes from reputable sources and has the best interests of its members at heart. In my opinion, OAC achieves that – but is it really that simple?

I thought about my journey that led me to the OAC – a journey that began innocently enough with a routine medical examination. The results, however, would change my life. When my provider told me they were recommending bariatric surgery as a treatment for my obesity, I was stunned. I had always been full-figured, and it never occurred to me that it was a negative thing. When the doctor told me she was recommending surgery, all I heard was, “You are so fat that you need to have surgery to get control over it.” Wow! I actually cried. I felt so alone, so out of control and so ashamed of myself. I decided in that moment not to take my health for granted and take control. And my journey began.



Debera sits with Michelle Vicari, OAC Chairwoman, at the OAC's National Convention.

After attending the mandatory education session, I felt a bit better about the idea of surgery – but I still wasn't certain. I met with the surgeon my primary care physician recommended to me, and my fears were partially laid to rest. It still took a couple months of soul searching, reflection and prayer to come to the decision to go ahead with surgery.

During this time, I questioned if it was appropriate for me to change the body designed for me by God. How dare I and for what purpose? My husband suggested that I may have been placed on this path as a way to help others. I didn't know how I could achieve that, but it did help me come closer to my decision. The day I met with the surgeon and care team after leaving the office, my husband told me that even if I chose not to have surgery, he could see me working in this field one day. Little did I know that only 18 months later, I would be working in my surgeon's office as a patient advocate – serving as a voice of the patient within the healthcare team.

In 2012, a postcard was placed on my desk from an organization called the Obesity Action Coalition, inviting me to their *Your Weight Matters* National Convention in Dallas. The conference was to be held the following week, so it was a bit late for me to attend. I was curious enough to do some research into the OAC, who they were and what this conference was about. I was impressed and thought I might attend the next year.

The following year, I had forgotten about the conference until a friend and fellow bariatric surgery patient asked me if I was planning to attend. I thought, "why not?" I needed the continuing education (CE) credits that the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS) required for ongoing staff so they could achieve accreditation as a Center of Excellence. My manager agreed that I could cover the conference registration fees with my education allotment.

OAC Membership Application

Why Join the OAC? The OAC is a more than 58,000 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: \$10/year
- 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)*.

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
- \$10
- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- 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



Debera Gau stands with OAC President/CEO Joe Nadglowski at the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention.



I've learned that obesity is a disease and not something to be ashamed of. It's a disease, not a lifestyle. ”

I immediately called the hotel and even though the room block was full, they agreed to offer me a room at the OAC's secured rate. Airfare dropped as well, making attending this conference a possibility. Everything seemed to be falling into place, so I decided this was a message from somewhere that I should attend.

A session was offered regarding advocacy training, and I signed-up thinking that it would be useful in my job role. When I walked into that session, I truly felt welcomed – but more importantly, valued. I attended that conference expecting to receive education, but I left with so much more. I left with a sense of community and value. I had been the voice of the patient for 10 years, but never really took the time to discover *my* voice. That advocacy session, as well as the entire conference, taught me that my voice mattered. I mattered.

After looking at a number of ways in which I could use my new-found skills to share my story, I realized that I wanted to be more closely involved with the OAC. So I filled out an application to volunteer in any way that I could.

With the skills and support that I've developed by attending the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention, I have been able to share my story. I've had the honor of serving on patient panels at medical conferences, presented seminars for people exploring bariatric surgery as a treatment option and given presentations at local conferences.

I've learned that obesity is a disease and not something to be ashamed of. It's a disease, not a lifestyle. By choosing surgical treatment and adopting a healthier lifestyle, I've been successful at treating it.

As a member of the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention Welcoming Committee, I am able to interact with and welcome attendees to the meeting. My goal is to make each and every person feel that same sense of welcome and belonging that I felt in 2013.

YWM2018 will be held in Denver, and this will be my first time serving as Chair of the Welcoming Committee. I think that I speak for the entire team when I say we can't wait to see you all there. It's a time for making new friendships, renewing past friendships and receiving education. Maybe like me, you'll find your voice. That's the reason I support the OAC – they helped me discover my voice.



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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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