



ADVOCACY NEWS ADVOCACY ACTION

Can Prevention Alone Solve the Obesity Epidemic?

By Joe Nadglowski

The obesity epidemic in the United States has been headline news throughout the past several months. First, it was First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign focusing on childhood obesity and more recently the "F as in Fat" report by the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) highlighting the continued growth of obesity rates in many states.

The proposed solutions in both of these efforts are that we need more obesity prevention initiatives in the U.S. In fact, there is no mention of treatment or weight-loss in the First Lady's efforts and only minor references in the TFAH report.

SO MY QUESTION IS: CAN PREVENTION ALONE SOLVE THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC?

In my opinion, the answer is clearly no. Why?

1. Prevention and treatment are not the same thing. Think about obesity as any other chronic condition. Once you are diagnosed with heart disease or cancer, your care adds a new set of tools that are specific to treatment. Do prevention efforts stop? No, of course not, you are still likely encouraged to quit smoking to help your heart and use sunscreen to protect your skin. But, that is not the sole solution, other treatments are offered. With obesity, this is often not the case.
2. We are simply running out of people to whom we can prevent obesity. More than 2/3 of Americans are already overweight or obese. If we really want to solve the obesity epidemic, don't we need to encourage improved health through weight-loss not just preventing future additional weight gain?
3. Despite its difficulty, obesity does get better when you treat it. Individuals affected by obesity do get healthier after receiving treatment. Modest weight-loss can, and often does, make a significant health difference. A greater focus on treatment would hopefully encourage more people to seek assistance and encourage scientists/physicians and others to develop new and more effective treatments.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT GO HAND-IN-HAND

Does this mean we should scale back prevention efforts to encourage more treatment? No, not at all. Clearly, prevention and treatment go hand-in-hand when it comes to addressing obesity. The often life-long struggle with weight re-

quires both. You may seek treatment, successfully lose weight and now need access to preventative efforts to maintain your successful weight-loss. Without both, the chance for long-term success is limited.

THE REAL PROBLEM: WEIGHT BIAS

So why isn't treatment receiving the attention it deserves? I previously stated obesity is difficult to treat, but my fear is the real reason lies in weight bias. Weight bias enables people to ignore the disease of obesity and the need for treatment. Too many blame the individual affected by excess weight solely for their struggles. They ignore the significant scientific evidence showing that obesity is a complex issue involving social, environmental, genetic and behavioral issues.

Moving forward, we need more individuals advocating on behalf of treatment, not at the expense of prevention, but as a supporting factor to it. I advocate for this type of balance everyday and encourage you to do the same. The First Lady has stepped forward as a tremendous advocate for prevention, but we now need a public official brave enough to advocate for treatment with the same passion. Help us find that person by writing your elected officials and encouraging them to take the lead. If you're not sure how to write your legislators, I encourage you to visit the OAC's Legislative Action Center on our Web site at www.obesityaction.org for helpful tips.

Prevention is important, but in the absence of intervention (or treatment), we are dooming ourselves to failure in addressing the obesity epidemic. For either prevention or treatment to be successful, you need the other. Why? Well, simply think about it.

If you feel differently or have an alternate view on the topic of "Prevention Versus Treatment," feel free to share your thoughts by writing the OAC at info@obesityaction.org.

About the Author:

Joe Nadglowski is President and CEO of the OAC. A frequent speaker and author, Mr. Nadglowski has more than 16 years of experience working in patient advocacy and education and is a graduate of the University of Florida. Joe is also the Executive Director of the ASMBS Foundation, through a partnership between the OAC and the Foundation. Through this partnership, the OAC and ASMBS Foundation aim to increase awareness and education on obesity and its treatments through the annual "Walk from Obesity."

NOTE: Opinions expressed by the authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the OAC.



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**



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info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



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