

Jeff Susman, MD
Editor-in-Chief



Do things really go better with Coke?

I was so “proud” when the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) announced that The Coca-Cola Company was the first partner in its Consumer Alliance program. In its press release, AAFP President Lori Heim, MD, describes the program as “a way of working with interested companies to develop educational materials to help consumers make informed decisions so they can include the products they love in a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle.” The content is to be posted on familydoctor.org and “will address sugar-free alternatives to help patients make better choices,” the press release states.

In fact, I can’t begin to express my excitement about working with a corporation whose most visible product is linked to the epidemic of obesity and tooth decay. Yet the

THE AAFP SHOULD OPT OUT OF ITS DEAL WITH THE COCA-COLA COMPANY.

relationship makes perfect sense in light of the AAFP’s work with Pepsico and McDonald’s to help support its Americans in Motion campaign. Indeed, the Academy has long been an innovator in patient education through familydoctor.org. The resource, *Family doctor: Your essential guide to health and wellbeing*, for example, is replete with helpful ads (including a spread featuring VasoRect Ultra next to an article on erectile dysfunction). Such judgment is hard to question.

“We’ve made a conscious effort to diversify our sources of revenue,” Heim notes. “This is the first of what we hope will be many Consumer Alliance agreements. We’re looking across a broad spectrum.”

The possibilities are endless! I eagerly await a deal with Phillip Morris to educate people about smoking, a partnership with Seagram’s to discourage alcohol misuse, and an alliance with Colt’s Manufacturing to combat gun violence.

I agree that the AAFP should look for new revenue sources, but is this the type of relationship that makes its members proud? Obviously, consumers choose products—some of which may adversely affect their health—on the basis of many factors. But developing consumer product partnerships in the arena of patient education poses an inherent conflict of interest and falls prey to subliminal influence, unconscious reciprocity, or—at a minimum—the *appearance* of endorsement.

To rely on The Coca-Cola Company to “enable consumers to make informed decisions about what they drink based on individual need,” as Rhona Applebaum, MD, Coca-Cola’s VP and chief scientific and regulatory officer, suggests, is like letting the fox guard the hen house. As a professional organization, the AAFP should promote the highest ethical standards. We owe our patients such unfettered relationships. The AAFP should exercise its opt-out clause with The Coca-Cola Company.

All things do not go better with Coke.

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