



HELP NOT HYPE: GETTING REAL ABOUT WEIGHT LOSS

White Paper Issues Call to Action for Healthcare Providers, Regulators, Media and Corporate America Against Unsubstantiated Weight Loss Claims

BOSTON (October 22, 2006) – The Reality Council, a group of esteemed experts on obesity, nutrition, diabetes and healthcare policy, released a White Paper today: “Help Not Hype: Getting Real About Weight Loss.” As a call to action, the White Paper appeals to healthcare providers, regulators, media and corporate America to recognize and support *realistic* approaches to weight loss, which cannot be achieved by relying on the exaggerated, unsubstantiated claims often touted by many over-the-counter weight control aids. According to a recent survey, more than twice as many consumers use OTC diet products than prescription weight loss drugs. Surprisingly, many believe these OTC weight loss products are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which is not true. The FTC reports that consumers spend roughly one billion dollars a year on weight loss products that do nothing to address the nation’s or the individual’s weight problem.¹

“Most people do not know that most over-the-counter products currently marketed for weight loss are largely unregulated,” says Reality Council co-chair Louis J. Aronne, MD, FACP of Cornell University Medical College in New York, NY. “The unsubstantiated claims associated with many of these products contribute to a tremendous public health epidemic by perpetuating consumers’ belief in ‘magic pills.’ It’s a vicious cycle that needs to be broken.”

The Reality Council, co-chaired by Dr. Aronne and George L. Blackburn, MD, PhD of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass., strives to increase:

- Awareness of false hopes created by unsubstantiated weight loss claims for weight loss aids that meet no reasonable scientific standards,
- Recognition of the importance of gradual weight loss gained through diet, exercise and lifestyle changes, and
- Realization of the significant health benefits associated with modest weight loss.

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“This White Paper’s intent is to focus the weight loss dialogue on the reality in weight control. Everyone needs to know that only gradual, modest weight loss and lifestyle changes can deliver successful and lasting weight management,” said Dr. Blackburn. “This initiative can build upon and complement the decade long effort of the FTC and its Partnership for Healthy Weight Management to promote sound guidance on strategies for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.”

Specific stakeholders – including healthcare professionals, regulators, media and corporate America – will play a critical role by embracing the reality message (also championed by other organizations, including the Federal Trade Commission) and exposing unsubstantiated weight loss claims with a goal toward improving the health of millions of Americans. The following calls to action are outlined in the White Paper:

- **Healthcare Providers:** Teach patients about realistic weight loss goals and discourage the use of weight loss products that make claims that do not meet reasonable scientific standards; continue to enhance standards of practice in treating and supporting individuals with realistic weight loss goals and strategies
- **Regulators:** Support and encourage the enforcement of existing laws and regulations impacting products that make unsubstantiated weight loss claims
- **Media:** Collaborate with health care professionals to communicate the consequences associated with the use of weight loss products that make unsubstantiated claims to: (a) develop and disseminate balanced messages that promote realistic weight loss strategies and (b) discuss the health implications of overweight or obese people
- **Corporate America:** Become a partner in the global efforts to educate and empower employees and consumers to make healthy decisions that support realistic weight loss strategies

The White Paper, edited by MRC Greenwood, PhD, of University of California, Davis, complements the efforts of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, which established the Red Flag program to encourage media to detect and “red flag” bogus weight loss advertisements. Members of the Reality Council include: Arthur Frank, MD, Obesity Specialist; Gary Foster,

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PhD, Behavioral Psychologist; Barbara Moore, PhD, Nutritionist; Judith Stern, ScD, Nutritionist; Nathaniel Clark, MD, MS, RD, Diabetes Specialist; Anne Wolf, MS, RD, Dietitian; Madelyn Fernstrom, PhD, CNS, Nutritionist; Susan Cummings, RD, Dietitian; Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH, Public Health Expert; Valentine Burroughs, MD, MBA, Diabetes Expert; Morgan Downey, JD., Obesity Specialist.

About Overweight and Obesity

Currently, approximately 65 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, according to the National Institutes of Health. At any given time, about one third of men and half of women in the United States are trying to lose weight. Unfortunately, they spend approximately \$46 billion per year on weight loss products and services^{2,3,4,5}. Overweight and obesity are associated with an increased risk of developing health problems such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.⁶ Factors that can contribute to overweight include an abundance of high-calorie foods, low levels of physical activity, behavior, environment, and genetics.⁷ Multiple studies have shown that a modest reduction in weight improves health outcomes significantly in overweight or obese patients.

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 - 7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Overweight and Obesity: Contributing Factors." http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/contributing_factors.htm. Accessed 12/22/05.