

February 16, 2010

Susan B. Shurin, M.D.
Director
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Building 31, Room 5H52
31 Center Drive MSC 2486
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Re: NHLBI/The Heart Truth and Coca Cola

Dear Dr. Shurin:

NHLBI's "The Heart Truth" campaign to raise awareness of heart disease and stroke among women, states accurately: "It is hard to overstate the dangers of an unhealthy weight."¹ That observation makes it all the more ironic that NHLBI would accept the Coca-Cola Co. as a principal partner of an important health campaign. Though Coke features Diet Coke in its marketing effort, surely NHLBI is aware that that company is a major contributor to America's epidemic of overweight and obesity. It is totally inappropriate that NHLBI should allow itself to be used by the world's biggest producer of "liquid candy" to bolster its sagging reputation. It is like allowing Philip Morris to be a sponsor of the government's anti-smoking campaign.

NHLBI's on-line materials recognize that being overweight increases the risk not only of heart disease, but also of diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, strokes, congestive heart failure, gall bladder disease, arthritis, breathing problems, gout, and cancers of the breast and colon. Sugar-sweetened beverages, on the other hand, are the *only* food or beverage that has been directly linked to obesity. Researchers have estimated that each extra soda consumed per day increases the risk of overweight by 60%.² Sugar-sweetened beverages are the largest single contributor of calories to the diet,³ providing as much as 10 to 15% of total caloric intake among teenagers.⁴ For a moderately active girl of 12, a "moderate" one can of soda represents about 8% of her daily calorie requirements. Those are some of the reasons why the Dietary Guidelines for

¹ *The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women*, P. 38; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Accessed February 12, 2010, at www.nhlbi.gov/educational/hearttruth/downloads/pdf/handbook-for-women.pdf.

² Ludwig, D.S., Peterson, K.E., Gortmaker, S.L. (2001). Relation between consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and childhood obesity: A prospective, observational analysis. *The Lancet*, 357(9255), 505-508.

³ Block, G. (2004) Foods contributing to energy intake in the U.S. Data from NHANES III and NHANES 1999-2000. *Journal of Food Consumption and Analysis*, 17, 439-447.

⁴ Murphy, M., Douglass, J., Latulippe, M., et al. Beverages as a source of energy and nutrients in diets of children and adolescents. *Exper. Biol.* 2005; Abstract #275.4.

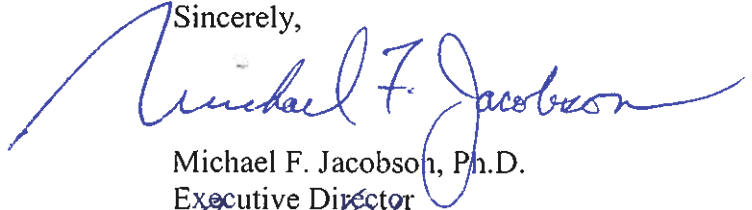
Americans, co-published by your parent agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, advises people to cut back on caloric soft drinks.⁵

NHLBI also should reject the sponsorship of Snyder's of Hanover, a major producer of snack foods made largely of white flour and salt. Those are exactly the kinds of products that the Dietary Guidelines and many heart-disease experts advise Americans to eat *less* of. But now Snyder's of Hanover can burnish its reputation by ballyhooing its association with a campaign to prevent heart disease.

Similarly, NHLBI has accepted sponsorship for The Heart Truth by the Sara Lee Corporation, a conglomerate that is most famous for its artery-clogging cheesecakes, but also markets fatty, salty Ball Park hot dogs and Jimmy Dean sausages.

We respectfully urge NHLBI to end its ill-conceived partnerships with corporations that market products that undermine women's (and men's and children's) health and to be more cautious about entering into such partnerships in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Jacobson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George A. Hacker". The signature is cursive and somewhat compact, with a distinct loop at the end.

George A. Hacker, J.D.
Advocate, Nutrition Policy

cc: Dr. Howard Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. 6th Edition, www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/pdf/dga2005.pdf