SECOND OPINIONS

We should be role models in campaign against obesity

Editor's note: This letter is in response to the vice president candidates’ statements about obesity (February 2004 AAP News, page 57).

Much has been written with great insight about the epidemic of obesity. Likewise, much has been proposed about possible strategies for individual physicians and the AAP to remedy this problem. In addition to raising awareness among families, politicians, industry and schools, shouldn’t we be talking about the importance of being role models when it comes to diet and physical activity? It’s an age-old dilemma that caregivers and health care providers sometimes advise: “Do as I say, not as I do.” After all, we’re being watched. In other areas of health care, our patients are paying attention to our behavior, and they may look to us as role models (whether we like it or not). They notice whether we strap our own kids into car seats, and then, whether we buckle up ourselves. When we cycle through town, it is noticed if our children (and we) are wearing helmets. Physicians whose clothing has the odor of tobacco can’t disguise their habit. Our young patients often are the first to notice. Speaking for myself as a “night owl,” drawn to long evenings at the computer, I find it hard to remind my like-minded son about the benefits of early bedtime. When bedtime rolls around, we both need to heed that advice. I can’t talk the talk if I can’t walk the walk upstairs to bed. My letter ends with a question: When it comes to counseling our patients about obesity in both primary care and specialty clinics, have there been studies investigating the presence of overweight in the pediatrician in terms of the impact of counseling children? Maybe it doesn’t matter at all. Can we look? The pitch has been made that we target everyone in our efforts to reverse the epidemic. I assume we would include health care providers and public health officials as well. At least, let us start talking about it.

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AAP ad campaign encourages healthy lifestyle

The Academy unveils a new public service advertisement (PSA) this month aimed at encouraging kids to exercise, eat right and have regular check-ups with their pediatrician.

Over the headline “No remote. No mouse. No controller.” the color ad — part of the Academy’s obesity-prevention emphasis — shows a group of children playing soccer in a park. “Get the ball rolling now, because a healthy future starts today,” says the ad, which also urges parents to visit the AAP Web site to find a FAAP. The ad debuts in a 24-page children’s health guide in the May issue of Parents magazine (circulation 2.1 million), which goes on sale later this month. Academy spokespersons are quoted extensively on a broad range of topics such as breastfeeding, SIDS, obesity, sports, mental health, and the treatment of insect bites, bee stings and burns. Also covered are healthy-living habits like car and bike safety, and protecting kids from the environmental hazards of tobacco, lead and mercury.

A Spanish language version of the ad will appear in the June/July issue of the Hispanic family magazine Ser Padres (circulation 500,000), a sister publication of Parents magazine.

“The Academy is breaking new ground with this ad,” says John Mitchell, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Committee on Membership, which developed the ad jointly with the Committee on Public Education, the Task Force on Obesity, and Communications and Membership staff. “The ad in the pediatric guide means many of our pediatric messages will reach millions of English and Spanish-speaking Americans.

“Developing the PSA fulfills an important need within the membership to promote pediatrics to the public. It was a fascinating process that took into account the views of our rank-and-file members, committees and staff. We wanted the ad to be issue-driven with a gentle plug that the FAAP designation is the gold standard when looking for the right children’s doctor,” Dr. Mitchell added.

The Academy is exploring ways to enable pediatricians to adapt the PSA for use in their own communities. Reprints of the AAP/Parents magazine guide, courtesy of Johnson & Johnson which also provided advertising support for the guide, will be included in the May AAP News.