

Letters

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Vetting journal advertisements

On page 1632 of the June 17, 2008, issue of *CMAJ* there is a full-page Coca-Cola advertisement. The copy reads, "Can't remember the last Coca-Cola ad targeted at children? There's a reason." It goes on to state that "... for over 50 years, we've adhered to a company policy that prohibits advertising soft drinks to children."

Although I am unaware of the means by which, or even if, the journal vets its advertisements, I am certainly aware that for decades Coca-Cola has targeted children in its advertisements. Using pitchmen the likes of cute animated polar bears, Santa Claus, Michael Jordan, Christina Aguilera and New Kids on the Block, it is clear that Coca-Cola has had no qualms about holding children squarely in its crosshairs.

Given that Canada is experiencing a rising tide of childhood obesity, I find it very disturbing to see what appears to be a bald-faced lie grace the pages of our pre-eminent medical journal. I hope the journal sees fit to set the record straight on this issue, and I hope that in the future it pays closer attention to the messages it allows to be broadcast from its pages.

Yoni Freedhoff MD
Medical Director, Bariatric Medical Institute, Ottawa, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

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[Coca-Cola Canada responds:]

As part of an ongoing and far-reaching series of discussions we have been hav-

ing with health and wellness stakeholders across Canada, we have encountered a number of common misperceptions about our products and policies, including the notion that we advertise soft drinks to children. We have run advertisements in publications including *CMAJ* to address this and other misperceptions.

For over 50 years, Coca-Cola has had a policy that prohibits any company advertising for any of our beverages in Canada on programming that is primarily directed to children younger than 12 years of age. (Any programming or media platform for which 50% or more of the audience is under 12 years of age is considered programming primarily directed to children.) Further, as a founding member of the Canadian Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative we voluntarily submit both the medium and the message of our advertising for audit by a third party Canadians trust: Advertising Standards Canada.

Amy Laski HBA
Communications Manager, Coca-Cola Canada, Toronto, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

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[CMA's Director of Publications responds:]

I thank Yoni Freedhoff for sharing his thoughts on the Coca-Cola Canada advertisement that appeared in the June 17 issue and subsequent issues of *CMAJ*.

As *CMAJ* publisher, I review all new advertisements submitted for publication in the journal. All advertisements must conform to the CMA Advertisement and Sponsorship Policies (www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/25274/la_id/1.htm). The Coca-Cola Canada advertisement fully complied with these policies, including the stipulation that advertising for food and bev-

erages comply with the pertinent sections of the Food and Drugs Act and Regulations.

Adherence to CMA's core principles of editorial independence, institutional integrity and consistency with CMA's mission, vision and values ensures that our publications remain trusted and credible sources of information for physicians and others. I continue to welcome an open dialogue to ensure our advertising standards are understood and upheld.

Glenda Proctor MSc
Director and Publisher, CMA Publications, Ottawa, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

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Microresearch: great idea but tough to execute

I read with pleasure and excitement MacDonald and Kabakyenga's editorial proposing a "microresearch" model to foster local, outcomes-based clinical research in developing countries.¹ This model has the potential to produce a real impact in communities in resource-deprived regions of the world.

However, having had a brief exposure to microfinance during my MBA studies, I have several concerns. First, who would contribute to the start-up fund? Unlike a microfinance fund, which can generate a return on investment, a microresearch fund is essentially a nonprofit initiative that provides grants to fund small-scale research projects. Given the uncertainty of the outcomes and impact of the projects, it may be hard to convince donors to support such a fund. Second, who would mentor the researchers in developing countries who receive the grants? It takes time, infrastructure and trained personnel to develop a research program. A volunteer-based mentorship system will not suffice, given that most researchers in the developed world are