

Letter to Hospitals

To:

Abbott Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis, MN; MCG Health Children's Medical Center, Augusta, GA; Northside Hospital, Atlanta, GA; Naval Medical Center, San Diego, CA; Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami, FL; Mercy Medical Center, Des Moines, IA; Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH; Broward General Medical Center, Fort Lauderdale, FL; Memorial Regional Hospital, Hollywood, FL; Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago, IL; Riley Hospital for Children, Indianapolis, IN; Truman Medical Center, Kansas City, MO; Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta, GA; Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego, CA; Ben Taub Hospital, Houston, TX; Methodist Rehabilitation Center, Jackson, MS; Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, TX; Tampa General Hospital, Tampa, FL; Driscoll Children's Hospital, Corpus Christi, TX; John Peter Smith Hospital, Fort Worth, TX; Kosair Children's Hospital, Louisville, KY

From:

Sara Deon, Value [the] Meal Campaign Director, Corporate Accountability International

Dear Hospital Administrator,

On behalf of thousands of health professionals who work daily to improve public health and who have joined the Value [the] Meal campaign, we are calling on you to help curb the epidemic of diet-related disease and to stop fostering a food environment that promotes harm, not health. We urge you to end your contract with McDonald's and to take action to remove the McDonald's restaurant from your hospital.

The rates of children suffering from diet-related disease are staggering. Today, private practices, pediatric clinics, and emergency rooms are increasingly bearing witness to children suffering from preventable chronic conditions related to the food they eat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the decades to come, one in three children will develop type 2 diabetes as a result of diets high in McDonald's-style junk food. And experts say that this generation may be the first in U.S. history to live shorter lives than their parents due to poor diets.

Moreover, as you are well aware, ballooning health care costs and an overburdened care system make treatment for diet-related conditions more difficult than ever. According to the CDC, the U.S. spends roughly \$147 billion on medical costs associated with diet-related illnesses each year, and that cost is expected to grow as this generation of children reaches adulthood. In an already over-burdened health care system, must we continue to perpetuate an epidemic with profound human and economic consequences, when prevention of diet-related disease can help to reverse this trend? Focusing on the food environment is a primary care imperative with the potential to prevent chronic disease for generations to come.

While the problem is complex, there are tangible solutions in addressing this crisis. For one, experts do know that reducing junk food consumption can significantly improve the health of kids. Scientific evidence also confirms what common sense has told us for decades - that environments laden with fast food restaurants and junk food marketing have profoundly negative impacts on children's lifelong eating habits and well-being.

Health professionals are devoted to caring for sick children and adults and to preventing illness. But these efforts cannot compete with the profit-driven mechanisms by which McDonald's and the fast food industry operate their business, and the toll that McDonald's practices have had on children's health.

Every day, parents, children, and health professionals turn to your institution for advice on well-being, for support in preventing and treating illness, and for sustaining a healthy community. As a hospital, you serve as a local authority on health, and as such, the community you serve looks to you and to your environment as a guide for their wellbeing.

However, in your role as a local health leader, you have allowed McDonald's—a corporation that has disregarded public health in the name of profits—to operate within an environment devoted to helping our children get well. A 2006 study published in *Pediatrics* concluded that by allowing a McDonald's store to operate inside your facility, you are not just affecting hospital guests' consumption on the day of their visit, but you are unintentionally boosting your guests' perception of the "healthfulness" of McDonald's food. In other words, your hospital is being used as part of McDonald's comprehensive marketing strategy, a strategy that is clearly inconsistent with your goals as a health institution.

It's really no surprise McDonald's sites stores in hospitals. After all, for decades, McDonald's has attempted to coopt the health community, to deflect blame for the epidemic of disease that it has helped drive, and to pose itself as part of the solution.

Yet, as a key decision maker at your hospital, you understand the need for cultivating healthier communities and better food environments. Our children, the medical community, and our health care system will benefit from your leadership on this issue.

Signed:
Sara Deon
Value [the] Meal Campaign Director