

NAAFA Newsletter

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NEWEST MEMBER OF NAAFA'S ADVISORY BOARD: DR. PAUL HASKEW, ED.D.

Dr. Haskew is a psychologist at the University of Connecticut, and he co-authored a letter with Dr. Paul Ernsberger that has been recently accepted for publication in several months in the New England Journal of Medicine. He has accepted his appointment by NAAFA's Board by writing the following:

"I'm flattered to be asked, and eager to serve. My first professional involvement with problems of eating and appearance was in 1969 when a bulimic student sought my assistance. Since then I have had a continuing and growing interest in these problems. I have become firmly convinced that the vast majority of eating and weight disorders are intimately connected with a discrimination against heavy people that has given rise to widespread fat phobia. The most direct way to alleviate the pain that is inflicted on, and self-inflicted by millions of Americans is to fight that discrimination in every possible way. To that end I work on an individual level with patients, I write for both public and professional audiences, and I support the goals and programs of NAAFA."

Dr. Haskew has a long list of credentials, including university appointments and publications in the area of eating disorders. He also co-authored a book, When Food is a Four-Letter Word (Paul Haskew & Cynthia H. Adams, Prentice-Hall, 1984, 144 pages).

Other members of the Advisory Board currently include: Paul Ernsberger, Ph.D., Chairman; William Bennett, M.D.; Abraham I. Friedman, M.D.; Angela Barron McBride, R.N., Ph.D.; Harry K. Panjwani, M.D.; O. Wayne Wooley, Ph.D.; and Susan C. Wooley, Ph.D. ■

NEWS AND COMMENT

BALLOON PROCEDURE BEING WIDELY PROMOTED--BUT LONG-TERM SUCCESS DOUBTED

The gastric bubble (balloon) is receiving widespread attention from the media, in headlines ranging from "Stomach Balloon for Obesity Gains Favor Amid Concerns" (New York Times, 4/29) to "Good News for Fatties--the Amazing Diet Bubble" (Weekly World News, 4/29).

Although the latter tabloid newspaper doesn't mention any of the risks or problems with the bubble, leading its readers to believe that the bubble is unconditionally safe and effective, the Times does a better job in voicing some concerns--concerns that were also mentioned in Dr. Paul Ernsberger's article on the bubble in this Newsletter (February). In that issue, Ernsberger questioned the safety and long-term effectiveness of the procedure.

The New York Times did not take a position on the subject, but quotes several professionals who have serious reservations about the bubble. Dr. Jules Hirsch of Rockefeller University (NY) is quoted as saying, "Before this device is recommended to anyone, good studies need to be done to see that it really makes the difference. Maintenance is the key, and I think the possibility is remote that it will be deemed effective a year from now."

Dr. Albert J. Stunkard of the University of Pennsylvania described the bubble as being "worthy of further study", predicting that it will be "too widely used with a minimum of information about it." Dr. Theodore Van Itallie of St. Lukes-Roosevelt Medical Center (NY) referred to "possible complications" and stated his opinion that the FDA "acted prematurely in approving the device."

Known complications primarily include stomach ulcers and, to a much lesser degree, gastrointestinal blockage. The co-inventors of the bubble, Dr. Lloyd R. Garren and Dr. Mary L Garren, are said to believe that, for the most part, only those who are more than 100% overweight should be considered candidates for the procedure. However, the manufacturer of the bubble, American Edwards Laboratories of

Irvine, California, sought FDA approval to allow its use on those who weigh as little as 20% more than their "ideal" body weight, and has trained 500 to 600 physicians how to insert and remove the bubble, which must be removed after four months to prevent deflation and the resulting intestinal blockage.

American Edwards told the Times that it is monitoring the use of the bubble by physicians around the country, and if they find that some doctors are "abusing" the bubble, they will be removed from the customer list. (Doctors purchase the bubble from American Edwards for \$400 each.) However, the Times did not publish any statement from the company as to what it feels constitutes an "abuse".

Hospital promotion of the bubble is becoming widespread. One such program was described in a page 1 story in this Newsletter last month. Since then, NAAFA member Amy Feinberg (PA) has submitted a typical ad from another hospital promoting a "NEW YOU: Nutrition - Exercise - Weight Loss Program". Most of these programs apparently include a supervised behavior modification diet in addition to the bubble.

COMMENTARY

As usual, millions will probably line up at the doors of hospitals and physicians demanding the procedure, and as usual, there will be some doctors who ignore the real needs of the patients, including signs that they might belong to that group of people who are risky candidates for the bubble. We expect to hear soon about people gaining five pounds so they can "qualify" as being 20% "overweight". Stories will appear of doctors persuaded to insert balloons in people who, as Dr. Mary Garren herself puts it, "want to lose 30 pounds before a wedding". Dr. Garren does not believe that use of the bubble is justified for cosmetic reasons--but we know how powerful those cosmetic reasons can be!

After the dust has settled in a year or so, and "bubble" people end up (in all likelihood) weighing as much as ever, we will give thanks when most of them will have only lost a few thousand dollars--and will not (hopefully) have done much permanent damage to their digestive systems, nor spent months hospitalized, as can happen to some who elect weight-loss surgery. Or at least, perhaps they will only be affected as much as if they had been on the usual diet yo-yo merry-go-round.

Too cynical a view, you say? Sorry, that's the way it looks to us. Are you tempted to try the bubble, as millions of others will be? Don't do it yet. Use the \$3,000 in the following radical way: Spend \$500 on new clothing. Attend the Cleveland convention for whatever it costs you. Donate \$500 to NAAFA, stipulating that it be used to create a fund for research on how to be healthy and feel well while being fat. And put the remainder in an interest-bearing account, to be used when you develop a new area in your life that you thought you weren't allowed to have because of your weight! Or, save it for the old age that you will probably live to see, now that you have given up experimenting with every new weight-loss gimmick that comes along--the old age that you've been told fat people don't have to bother saving for... ■

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MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH - As expected, the National Enquirer weekly tabloid has run a full-page article with photos of New Jersey chapter Co-Chairpersons Jim Brown and Mary-Jane Grace. The April 29 issue, although starting out with a typical Enquirer expressions ("an earth-shattering 445 pounds..."), was very warm and supportive of Mary-Jane, with her story of nearly losing her life after weight-loss surgery, of joining NAAFA and meeting Jim and other friendly people, and of planning her wedding at the upcoming NAAFA convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

Eileen M. Lefebure (NY), NAAFA President, was interviewed on the TV show Best Talk in Town (NYC) in early May. Neil and Paula Dachis (MD), appeared again on the AM Philadelphia television show. The London Sunday Mirror has expressed interest in NAAFA, as has the New York bureau of French National TV.

The Bridgeport Post (CT) contacted NAAFA in preparation of a story on large-size fashions; and the Daily Herald in Chicago called for information to be used in a story about discrimination. A very supportive article about NAAFA's views and those of member Clare Skeehan (PA), who is active in the Western PA chapter, appeared March 18 in the News Record, North Hills, PA. (Submitted by Chris Mohan, Chairperson.)

NOW IN PREPARATION - Shows on male F.A.'s and their point of view are still scheduled to appear on June 11 (Boston's People are Talking) and on June 12 (Pittsburgh Today). The shows will feature NAAFA Chairman Bill Fabrey and Vice-President Conrad Blickenstorfer. NAAFA is still slated for a listing in July Shape magazine, and to appear in GEO magazine soon.

ADVERTISING UPDATE - The 1/12 page NAAFA ad that appeared in the Winter 1986 issue of Radiance magazine has been followed by an ad four times as large in the Spring edition. Advertising in Radiance is bringing results, especially as their distribution is becoming more national in scope. Ads in other national publications are in the works.

OTHER MEDIA ITEMS - NAAFA award-winner, actress Marcia Kimmell, has a key role in the theatrical show The Sea Horse, to be seen at the Third Wave Studios in San Francisco, from May 9 through June 28. Kimmell, associated with the show Leftovers, was pictured on page 2 of the Newsletter, Vol.X, No.6. ■

"WIRE THEIR MOUTHS SHUT," GRANNY SAID

by Aglaia Koras-Bain
New Jersey

I find it more startling now than ever before to be confronted by fat prejudice. I guess it's mainly because of the contrast between the way I feel about myself now and the way some people react to me. It's jarring.

An unforgettable experience along these lines happened recently when I appeared on a television show in Philadelphia with four other NAAFans. We were there to discuss fat rights, and to open the show, as we entered the studio and took our seats, the host asked the audience, "Well...what do you think of the panel?"

"They eat too much!"

"It could be a glandular problem, but I doubt it."

"Wire their mouths shut."

These were some of the responses from the audience, which consisted mostly of older men and women. Now, I'm no "spring chicken" when it comes to experiencing fat prejudice. I've been fat all my life, and I've experienced the pain of discrimination for as long as I can remember. But never before had it occurred to me in this precise way just how much prejudice people feel toward fat people. The members of the audience hadn't even waited until we'd been introduced before making faulty conclusions about our lifestyles and downright hostile "suggestions" like depriving us of food entirely! (And these were people who I never would have hesitated to help across the street if they'd asked me to.)

At first I felt embarrassed and hurt--but then I felt angry, realizing how much ignorance exists and how big a job we NAAFans have ahead of us. I decided I would do my best to dispel their myths.

After we introduced ourselves and began to talk about our lives and answer questions, the audience began to act more and more accepting of us. By the end of the show, many people had admitted that they found us attractive.

At the end of the program a black woman walked over to me and said that she had experienced much more prejudice over being fat than over being black. She thanked us for the things we shared on the show. I gave her a hug and felt good that I had contributed in a small way toward our goal of promoting acceptance for fat people. ■

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ATTORNEYS SEEKING EXPERT WITNESSES IN HUMAN RIGHTS CASE - A landmark legal case is developing in Rhode Island (Sharon Russell vs. Salve Regina College, described in the Feb. 1986 **Newsletter**, p.2-3), in which a nursing student was apparently deprived of her rights to an education due to the college's attitude about her weight. The legal basis of the case is an interpretation of federal statutes, combined with the federal funding the college receives.

Attorneys for Ms. Russell have written to NAAFA requesting assistance in the form of witnesses who can testify knowledgeably on either of two subjects: First, on the nutritional and health aspects of a reducing diet prescribed by the college, in which Ms. Russell was to lose up to 5 pounds a week; and second, on the extent to which nursing duties can be performed properly without hindrance due to the nurse's weight.

According to the law firm which is representing Ms. Russell, anyone who is qualified to speak on either of these subjects, who resides not far from Rhode Island, and who is willing to support their client by testimony, should contact them through NAAFA (PO Box 43, Bellerose, NY 11426) stating their professional qualifications and interest in the case.

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CAMPAIGN '86 FUND DRIVE ON WAY TO REACHING GOAL - NAAFans have been responding well to the fund drive, according to Bunny Peckham, Chairperson of the Fundraising Committee. The drive, which was launched on March 14, has already brought in almost \$1,200 in donations and pledges.



Last year's campaign brought in more than \$2,000 over a 12 month period, and the goal for 1986 was set at \$3,000. "This goal represents about two dollars for each NAAFA member, and seems modest when compared to the basic annual dues of \$25," Peckham said.

Donations and pledges for the fund drive are still coming in, and will be accepted for the next several months. The "thank you" list of donors will be published as soon as the drive seems substantially complete. ■

WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY: YOU CAN SAY NO!

by Barbara Campbell
California

In the Newsletter article (Vol.X, No.6, 1985) about NAAFans' reactions to Dr. Paul Ernsberger's Report on Weight-Loss Surgery, you read about a member calling the NAAFA office to say that due to the report, she had cancelled her upcoming surgery. I am that NAAFAn, and I'm writing this in hopes that my story may give others the courage to say NO to such surgery--even at the last minute.

In the summer of 1984 I was having a lot of trouble with an old back injury. Therapy and medication just weren't working to ease my pain. "If you don't lose weight, it will only get worse," my doctor said, after examining me.

The doctor's words haunted me as I grappled with the idea of weight-loss surgery. "OK, it's a chance for a happier, pain-free future," I thought as I called for an appointment with the surgeon.

"Prime candidate for surgery," said the surgeon after my examination. "Prime candidate for surgery," repeated the endocrinologist to whom I was sent for blood and hormonal testing. "Prime candidate for surgery," announced the psychologist to whom I had been referred for evaluation. These professionals all seemed very surprised (and a little disappointed?) to see just how healthy I was. I know they expected to find lots of things wrong with me such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or something to prove how bad being fat "really" is.

After four months of examinations, interviews, and patiently waiting (at the edge of my seat), I received the news that I had been accepted. The surgery was scheduled for the second Monday of December. By Thursday morning I was already packed and was working out those last minute details before entering the hospital. When the mail arrived that morning, it included Ernsberger's Report on Weight-Loss Surgery. I literally devoured every word of the report, reading and rereading it throughout the night.

The next morning I discussed the report with my family, made copies of it, and arrived at my surgeon's office with a copy in hand. I said that I was cancelling the surgery and showed him the report to back up my decision. I made it clear that my change of heart was not due to a lack of courage. Instead, it was due to the lack of information from him about the surgery and its possible side effects, (making an informed decision impossible for me previously) which had caused me to decide against the surgery now. This is one case where what you don't know CAN hurt you. The surgery could have caused what it was supposed to help me avoid--future back problems!

When I returned home, I left a "thank you" message on the NAAFA answering machine and began to call all my friends to tell them of my decision to cancel due to the Ernsberger report. None of them had received their copy yet and didn't know what I was talking about. I think that it was a strange and wonderful turn of fate that I got the report just three days before I was to be admitted to the hospital, when my NAAFA friends didn't receive their copies until one to three weeks later! (Bulk mail has always been unpredictable--Ed.)

I discovered something interesting about my surgery plans after I cancelled them. While I was going through the testing and evaluation appointments, I wasn't aware that my family and friends were going through tough times as well. They were showing support of my decision to have the surgery while carrying the burden of wanting the best for me, but being afraid of possible problems with surgery. I finally understood just how they felt when my best friend, Carolyn Owens said that while I was preparing for surgery, she was "preparing myself to lose a friend."

In the months since, I have enrolled in a swimming pool exercise therapy class through the Easter Seal Society and am firming up and losing weight slowly. I have a lot less pain and am doing fine. Thank you, Dr. Paul Ernsberger, and thank you, NAAFA, for providing the information which surely has saved me from possible complications--and maybe even my life! ■

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Paul Ernsberger's regular column is on "vacation" this month. His series, RESETTING YOUR SETPOINT will continue in an upcoming issue with his discussion of the basic food groups and their effect on body weight setpoint.

Articles in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of NAAFA, Inc., unless specifically noted. Please contact the NAAFA office if you require information about specific NAAFA policies. Commentaries in this Newsletter were prepared by the Editor, and/or Chairman Fabrey.