



Quest Physician Update

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Transforming Healthcare-Together.

Dear Colleagues,

Healthy communities and high value healthcare are what Quality Quest for Health of Illinois is all about. So a recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* caught my attention. "Ounces of Prevention – The Public Policy Case for Taxes on Sugared Beverage" in the April 30, 2009 issue is authored by Dr. Brownell of Yale University and Dr. Frieden with the New York City Health Commission. (N Engl J Med. 2009 Apr 30;360(18):1805-8.)

With an obesity epidemic that shows little sign of slowing, they conclude that sugar-sweetened beverages are driving the epidemic. Their case is compelling. A few statistics:

- As of the mid-1990's, children drink more sugared beverages than milk.
- Since 1999, children's calories from beverages increased by 30 percent.
- Beverages make up 10-15% of calories consumed by children and teens.
- One can per day increases a child's risk of becoming obese by 60%.

Why has this tremendous change occurred? One cause is pervasive marketing to children. It is estimated that the average child sees 10,000 commercials every year, mostly for candy, fast food, soft drinks, and sugared cereals.

Another is cost. The article graphs the price of fruits and vegetables, sugars and sweeteners, and carbonated beverages compared to the consumer price index (CPI). Fruits and vegetables have increased in price much faster than inflation, while sweeteners and carbonated beverages have not gone up as much as inflation, making them less expensive and more affordable. Experts predict that if the obesity epidemic is not reversed, today's children will become the first generation of Americans who do not live as long as their parents.

Are sugared beverages the new tobacco? You be the judge.

Respectfully,

Gail M. Amundson, MD, FACP