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Infesting academic conferences: brands linked to ill health

Empirical evidence shows the links between sweetened soft drinks^{1,2} or fast food³ and chronic illness such as obesity and diabetes. However, as a researcher investigating the causes of obesity, I have become disappointed at the presence of brands of unhealthy products at major conferences relating to obesity, physical activity, and nutrition. In recent years, brands such as Coca Cola Inc and McDonalds Corp have sponsored several conference events.

At Obesity Week 2013—the annual scientific meeting of the Obesity Society—not only were Coca Cola products available, but the company also sponsored one of the keynote presentations. Meanwhile another keynote address highlighted the risks of consuming sweetened soft drinks. Last year Coca Cola Inc also sponsored the Congress of the European College of Sport Sciences in Amsterdam, Netherlands; the International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and the Childhood Obesity and Public Health Conference in Baton Rouge, LA, USA. Similarly, McDonalds Corp sponsored the California Dietetic Association Conference in Pomona, CA, USA, and both Coca Cola Inc and McDonalds Corp sponsored the Dietitians Association of Australia Conference in Brisbane, QLD, Australia, and the Canadian Obesity Summit in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

It is time for academics and professionals to take a stand against these global companies, whose products have been linked with ill health, and for conference organisers to refrain from these conflicting and confusing partnerships. There is no place for brands of unhealthy consumption at health, physical activity, or nutrition conferences, and organising committees of such events

should select sponsors that do not conflict with empirical evidence that might well be disseminated at the conference or in the journals they are aligned with.

I declare no competing interests.

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- 2 Vartanian LR, Schwartz MB, Brownell KD. Effects of soft drink consumption on nutrition and health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Am J Public Health* 2007; **97**: 667–75.
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