

# Branding Obesity as a Disease—Who Wins?

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The American Medical Association has long described obesity as a “major public health problem.” But recently this classification has been changed to identify obesity as a “disease.” Labeling obesity as a disease shifts the mindset of policy-makers, the medical community, and the public at large.

On the heels of the American Medical Association’s announcement to change the classification of obesity to a disease, some members of Congress introduced a bill to expand Medicare reimbursements for weight-loss drugs and weight-reduction treatments. These actions only further bankrupt a system that is already broken. Labeling obesity a “pathology” does little to address the root cause of obesity. Rather it drives up health care costs, lines the pockets of pharmaceutical companies and drives down the health of our nation.

Labeling obesity as a disease significantly changes the way the medical community approaches obesity. Focus is no longer placed on lifestyle and diet but rather on finding the “obesity gene,” creating “obesity vaccinations,” and drug-based obesity treatments. Obesity medications and bariatric surgeries come with dangerous side effects and early obesity vaccination research has uncovered serious concerns associated with this intervention.



Classifying obesity as a disease also has a profoundly negative effect on the mindset of individuals diagnosed with this “disease.” Often when people are told they have a “disease” they begin to lose hope, and feel an attachment to their “disease.” Their focus changes from getting healthy to managing the “obesity disease.” Anyone who has seen the television show, *The Biggest Loser*, knows that you can change obesity.

Living in a world abundant with calorie-dense, unhealthy, fake foods, along with sedentary jobs and a lack of physical activity makes obesity a serious problem in our nation. However, it is a result of poor lifestyle and eating habits, not a medical “disease.” Dr. David L. Katz, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center, gives a compelling explanation as to why obesity should not be viewed as a medical diagnosis:

“We are drowning in calories. And that’s how, in my opinion, we should make obesity medically legitimate: as a form of drowning, not as a disease. With drowning, we don’t rely on advances from pharmaceutical companies. No one is expecting a drug to “fix” our capacity to drown. Our capacity to drown is part of the normal physiology of terrestrial species... Thinking of obesity as a form of drowning offers valuable analogies for treatment. We don’t wait for people to drown and devote our focus to resuscitation; we do everything we can to prevent drowning in the first place. We put fences

around pools, station lifeguards at the beaches, get our kids to swimming lessons at the first opportunity, and keep a close eye on one another. People still do drown, and so we need medical intervention as well. But that is a last resort, far less good than prevention, and applied far less commonly.”

Hungry for more information on what really contributes to obesity and what you can do about it? Watch the movie and read the book, *Hungry for Change*. ■



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