

June 22, 2012

To: Academy Board of Directors
Academy House of Delegates Leadership Team
Pat Babjak, Chief Executive Officer
Harold Holler, Vice President, Governance & Practice
Anna Murphy, Senior Manager, Governance
Donna Wickstrom, Manager, Governance
Charlene Rice, Coordinator, Governance
Jennifer Horton, Director of Corporate Relations
Daun Longshore, Manager of Corporate Relations

From: Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD, Delegate, Hunger & Environmental Nutrition DPG
Lisa Dierks, RD, LD, Delegate, Minnesota
Stephanie Heim, MPH, RD, LD, Delegate, 30 and under
Eleanor Pella, MS, RD, LDN, Delegate, Vegetarian Nutrition DPG
Pat Bebo, MS, RD, LDN, Delegate, Massachusetts
Ane Marie Kis, MS, RD, LDN, Delegate, Integrative & Functional Medicine

Re: Academy Corporate Sponsor Program and Influence on HOD

In light of the media this past year analyzing the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' relationships with major food and beverage industries, we feel compelled to make a critical request of the Academy Board of Directors and the House of Delegates Leadership Team. We are acting as leaders within the Academy and are not acting on behalf of an Affiliate or DPG.

As delegates to the House of Delegates, we are asking the Academy to act upon two related items. First, remove all presence of corporate sponsors at the House of Delegates meetings. The integration of corporate partner presentations into the HOD agenda has undue influence on the decisions that are made about the profession and the organization. Second, to form an Academy Corporate Relations Committee. This committee would be under the BOD/HOD and consist of Academy members who work with staff on identifying and retaining corporate sponsors that meet Academy's mission, vision, and values.

To address the first request, at the Fall 2011 HOD meeting, each of the four (ADA) Partners gave presentations on topics such as leadership and working as part of a team. The topics were too closely aligned with the HOD Dialogue Session on Interdisciplinary Teams thus influencing table discussions and reporting. Although this long-time practice is not outlined in the Academy Sponsorship Guidelines, it appears to be in direct conflict with the Corporate Relations Program as stated on the Academy website:

Academy Guidelines for Corporate Relations Sponsors

"In its relations with corporate organizations, the Academy is mindful of the need to avoid a perception of conflict of interest and to act at all times in ways that will only enhance the credibility and professional recognition of the Academy and its members. The continuing value of the Academy's name depends on its' reputation for integrity, which has been earned by generations of Academy members over the course of many decades...The Academy's procedures and formal agreements with external organizations are designed to prevent any undue corporate influence particularly where there is a possibility that corporate self-interest might

tend to conflict with sound science or Academy positions, policies and philosophies (accessed on June 11, 2012, available at <http://www.eatright.org/HealthProfessionals/content.aspx?id=7444>).”

To the second request, regardless if they are real or perceived, the influence of Academy corporate sponsors has not only sparked scrutiny among journalists, but has led to several conversations in which members have had to defend these relationships and the profession at national conferences and forums. These confrontations have led to rising humiliation and a growing discomfort while fulfilling the role as Delegates. In some instances, this has led to long-time members leaving the organization. We urge the Academy to uphold more transparent and stricter guidelines on access of corporate sponsors to Academy leadership and to remove their presence at meetings, such as HOD, in which decisions about the profession and/or the organization are made. This will avoid conflict of interest, advance transparency, maintain professional and organizational integrity, and establish a more credible national presence.

A solution for improving the transparency and integrity of the Corporate Partner Program would be to form an Academy Corporate Relations Committee. This committee would be under the BOD/HOD and consist of Academy members who work with staff on identifying and retaining corporate sponsors that meet Academy’s mission, vision, and values and are not in conflict with the mission and vision of DPGs, MIGs, or other committees. Committee members would have the capacity to cultivate relationships with corporations and organizations that more closely align with Academy principles, strategic plan and HOD goals. The committee could establish more defined criteriaⁱ for corporate sponsor selection including holding corporate sponsors to the same code of ethics as dietetic practitioners, specifically upholding the health, safety, and welfare of the public at all times and that they do not engage in false or misleading practices or communications. Lastly, as the Academy builds public policy momentum, we strongly encourage a criterion to be included in which corporate sponsors who engage in public policy and advocacy efforts align with and support the public policy efforts of the Academy.

We will continue to serve the Academy in a leadership capacity in an effort to advance the credibility and integrity of the Academy and the dietetic profession. Removing the involvement of corporate sponsors from HOD meetings and forming an Academy Corporate Relations Committee are two strategies that will establish an environment in which we can concentrate on making the best decisions for the dietetic profession and the Academy. We look forward to your swift response and action.

ⁱ The Hunger & Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group has developed new criteria for corporate partners titled “External Collaborator Relationship Opportunities.”