

Criticism of our criticism

By ACSH Staff — June 26, 2012

Last week, we [covered](#) [1] the latest announcement from the American Medical Association, which stated that if taxes on sodas were to be implemented, the revenues gained could be used toward funding anti-obesity programs. We were critical of the AMA for supporting the policy, observing not only that the statistical modeling the AMA used to support their position was flawed, but also that revenue from a soda tax is unlikely to actually go toward its intended use.

Yesterday, however, we received a letter from ACSH advisor Dr. Stephen K. Epstein, assistant professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School, who was present at the AMA meeting. He pointed out how we may have gotten a little carried away with our critique:

The recommendations of the [AMA House of Delegate s] Council on Science and Public Health state: "Taxes on beverages with added sweeteners are one means by which consumer education campaigns and other obesity-related programs could be financed !"

This is a simple true statement. It doesn't not call for this to occur, but points out that this is one way among many to possibly fund consumer education.

In the same [Dispatch](#) [1] item, we also expressed our frustration that, instead of advising folks to switch to diet soda, the AMA suggested that such beverages required further study. To ACSH s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, this vague recommendation implied that the AMA was voicing uncertainty about the safety of the artificial sweeteners used in such diet sodas. Some of these sweeteners, in fact, have been used safely for more than three decades; thus the AMA s remarks prompted Dr. Whelan to accuse the organization of straying from the scientific evidence. But Dr. Epstein again steps in to clarify:

As for why further study of non-caloric sweeteners is called for, the answer is in the body of the report: "Despite the negligible calorie content of diet beverages and the intervention trials noted above, several, although not all, large cross-sectional and prospective observational studies find direct associations between consumption of artificial sweeteners and body weight."

The report cites the studies supporting these claims. The conclusion is that artificial sweeteners might not be the answer to the obesity crisis, and therefore the issue warrants further study.

We are grateful to Dr. Epstein for his clarifications, says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. There s nothing like an eyewitness and participant to lend perspective. I d like to also note that, while the AMA s statements are both exactly as Dr. Epstein noted, the organization needs to be careful in these fraught circumstances not to give ammunition to advocates and media whose perspectives are not as objective as his, and ours.

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[1] http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.3717/news_detail.asp