

And Now a Word From Our Sponsors



Are America's
Nutrition Professionals
in the Pocket of Big Food?

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POLITICS

APPENDIX 1

Overheard: Former AND Members Speak Out

Carla S Caccia, RD, LDN

I am not a member of AND. I am so upset over their relationships with certain food manufacturers and lack of support for certain food policies, such as GMO labeling. However, I was thinking of checking into [the progressive dietetic practice group] HEN and seeing if it would be worth it to join AND.

[Corporate sponsorship] is unethical. Some of the food companies' products are full of questionable and/or harmful ingredients. The food companies are taking advantage of the whole "variety, moderation, balance" theme. They say "all foods fit." Well, I used to think that. But now I'm not so sure. Are GMOs safe in moderation? I don't know. Caramel coloring? High fructose corn syrup? Is lean meat still the healthy choice even though the animal was given general antibiotics? Is grilled chicken still the healthy choice even though it ate feed contaminated with arsenic? I don't know and I'm supposed to be the expert! I would like to turn to AND for these answers but I can't trust them because they are in partnership with food companies whose products are full of these things.

There are great handouts from AND. Also, the Nutrition Care Manual is a great resource, but some of the sample menus list brand names: i.e., Quaker, Nature's Own, Hot Pockets and I'm not OK with that because: 1) it indicates that those brands paid their way into the menus (I don't know if they did but why else would those brands and not others be listed?) and 2) those brands aren't the healthiest and I wouldn't necessarily recommend them to my clients. If I did provide these handouts, my clients might

think those brands are somehow better or more nutritious because it came from me, an RD, and has the "AND stamp of approval."

*AND says RDs are the food & nutrition experts and I like to think we are. There are many informed, professional RDs. Also, AND does a lot of great work. **However, it sends a message of corruption when we have relationships with food companies whose products are incredibly unhealthy. That can put all RDs under a cloud of suspicion. How can consumers trust us when our professional organization partners with junk food companies?***

Aaron Flores, RD

I was an ADA/AND member from 2002 (when I started school to become an RD) to this year 2013.

For the past few years I have really struggled with whether or not I should renew my membership. I do not like the fact that AND partners with organizations like Coca-Cola, Hershey's, Mars, General Mills and Kellogg's. I think that it sends the wrong message about our organization as a whole—whose primary goal is to promote good nutrition—while taking money from companies whose products are mostly thought of as not healthy. This year I have decided I will no longer be a member of the Academy.

What really disturbs me is that by partnering with agribusiness, I feel it dilutes our credibility as nutrition professionals. What really highlighted that to me was when [New York City] Mayor Bloomberg proposed his ban on large sugary beverages. It was such

a controversial topic and everyone had an opinion on one side or the other. But instead of taking a stand, AND had no position. How could they have no position on such a topic? I felt that it was their partnerships with Coke and Pepsi that prevented them from taking a stand even if they wanted to.

I think the partnership with big food companies ruins our credibility as nutrition experts. The perception is that because we partner with companies like Coke, PepsiCo, Mars, and Hershey's that we act on their behalf or in their interest. Even though that might not be the case, that is the perception and unfortunately, perception is everything.

I think it's important to note that I'm not anti-AND. I am proud to be a RD. There are some great people in AND who are doing some important work. I feel though that until they change this policy, that the biggest statement I can make is to vote with my pocket book. Some of my colleagues do not agree with me and what I hope for is that this conversation continues. I want RDs to talk about this issue. If more people start talking about it, AND might start to listen. If AND were to change its corporate sponsorship policy, I would happily re-join.

Denise Julia Garbinski, MBA, RD [current member re-considering]

AND's ongoing demonstration of being in bed with agribusiness big food and its 'neutral' (but obviously not neutral stance) on Prop 37 [labeling GMO foods] just disgusts me to the point where I am choosing to vote with my dollars against supporting AND. I don't attend their functions and am seriously considering withdrawing my membership next year. So many of the good folks in the HEN, DIFN and Veg DPG's [dietetic practice groups] keep up their AND memberships because it's mandatory in order to join the DPG.

And they pay to attend FNCE when all they really want to do is attend their DPG meetings. AND doesn't hear their battle cry in this case, as AND still gets their money.

I feel like there should be some sort of internal boycott against supporting AND until they represent our views but no one is really doing that, so I am.

Heidi Turner, MS, RD, CD

I left AND for a few reasons. One was its focus on mainstream dietetics. The recommendations they make to patients are industry-driven and out of date. If I was told one more time that dairy is the primary way to get calcium into patients I was going to scream. In this particular case, they are heavily sponsored by the National Dairy Council and their biases show in their recommendations. Their overall philosophy of what types of foods and diets to recommend to patients was not consistent with my own.

Also, I got tired of the fact that they continued to accept corporate dollars for advertising in their journals/conferences from what I would consider to be "junk" food companies. They seem to accept and celebrate the idea that Coca Cola, Hershey's, Pepsi, General Mills and others can be part of a healthy diet, completely ignoring the fact that these very companies are creating other products that are at the core of our obesity epidemic. I suppose they need to get money from somewhere, but, come on. **If you're trying to be at the forefront of changing what people eat, then at least accept funding from sponsors who truly share that vision, and aren't just looking to appear "healthy" via their association with AND.**

That said, AND has lobbied hard to ensure that RDs like me are considered a critical part of the health care picture and for that I am grateful.