

Julie Welch, MD

12978 Rocky Pointe Road • McCordsville, Indiana 46055

E-Mail: jlwelch@iu.edu

Date: December 1, 2013

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to bring to your attention a recent advertising campaign for the new Obamacare government health insurance marketplace through ProgressNow Colorado. The ad campaign was launched by ProgressNow Colorado and the Colorado Consumer Health Initiative for the online marketplace called "Connect for Health Colorado" in October 2013. The ads are housed on the website of Progress Now Colorado (<http://doyougotinsurance.com>).

The campaign is titled "Got Insurance" and is a play on the "Got Milk" phrase. But unlike the health benefits of milk, the "Got Insurance" ads do not universally advertise healthy choices; rather, many celebrate the unhealthy, high-risk behaviors of young adults. The ads of concern are referred to as "Brosurance," "Brosurance for the Ladies," or "Hosurance," by the media and depict keg-stands, alcohol consumption, and women picking up guys.

Many of the ads have gone viral on the Internet and social media. Although I have heard numerous comments from the public, I have not seen your administration take a stand one way or another on the messages being presented in this ad campaign. Silence can only be interpreted as complacency and acceptance. I, however, am neither complacent nor acceptant of the ads that overtly objectify women and promote high-risk behaviors. And as an emergency medicine physician, medical educator, woman, mother, and taxpayer I would like to express my concerns.

Although the ad campaign has expanded to pertain to a broader audience, I am concerned about the message conveyed in several specific ads. One of the ads, titled "Let's Get Physical," depicts a woman holding birth control pills and contemplating how she will get a guy to have sex with her. Five of the ads depict or blatantly celebrate alcohol consumption, titled "Brosurance," "Club Med," "Friends with Benefits," "Keg ER," and "Get Your Shots." What message are these ads sending to our young people and our children? As these ads go viral on social media, young people may think that keg stands and one-night stands are okay. Especially since they are being advertised in association with healthcare, Obamacare specifically.

Being an emergency department physician, health insurance ads should not glorify alcohol consumption, doing keg stands, drinking shots, or promiscuous sex. In the emergency department, cases of trauma, physical assault, sexual assault, and motor vehicle crashes are commonly associated with substance abuse, including alcohol consumption. In addition, alcohol consumption, for some patients, becomes a lifelong disease of alcohol addiction leading to serious health effects including hepatitis, cirrhosis of the liver, bone marrow dysfunction, esophageal varicosities, intestinal bleeding, and death. And it typically begins with partying as a young adult, a time when the message is "it's cool to drink" and "you have to drink to have fun." The message I want my patients and medical students to understand is the opposite message I see in these ads. In fact, many of these ads could be used to educate patients (including our teenagers) to the potential negative health consequences of high-risk behaviors. For instance, if you go to a party and do keg stands, then hook up with a girl because she is on birth control pills, what are all of the negative outcomes you can foresee? Having health insurance will be the least of your worries the next morning.

The ad I am most concerned about is “Let’s Get Physical.” (I have included a copy with this letter.) It depicts a young woman hold a packet of birth control pills standing next to a young man and reads: “OMG, he’s hot! Let’s hope he’s as easy to get as this birth control. My health insurance covers the pill, which means all I have to worry about is getting him between the covers. I got insurance. Now you can too. Thanks Obamacare!” There is an *asterix at the bottom of the ad that reads in tiny print: “The pill doesn’t protect you from STDs, condoms and common sense do that.” The message from this ad is alarming in several ways and sends the wrong message to women, men, girls, and boys.

1. This ad objectifies women, making her the object of sex. This alone is the most damaging consequence of advertising such as this. This ad seriously harms the progress we have made in women’s rights and the way in which women are depicted in the media. It is degrading and offensive.
2. Promiscuous sexual behavior has serious risks for a woman including increased risk of cervical cancer, transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STI), unintended pregnancy, as well as psychological aftermath.
3. Birth control pills do not protect against HIV, herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, or other sexually transmitted diseases. And the small asterix message at the bottom of the ad does not out way the message put forth in the ad. In fact, using a condom does not eliminate the risk of STD transmission via other routes.
4. Birth control pills are not 100% effective in preventing pregnancy.
5. Birth control pills and reproductive health rights do not equal healthy sexual choices. This ad does not depict responsible reproductive rights. In fact, this ad seems to say that women with birth control pills are sexually promiscuous and just take them to hook up with a guy. This ad also seems to insinuate that now that she has birth control pills, the barriers to a having a sexual relationship are nearly gone. Just getting the guy into bed is all that’s left.
6. Finally, what message does this ad send to men? Or teenage boys? That a female just wants to get “him between the covers”? I fear this ad could promote aggressive behavior towards women, especially if combined with the people in the ads doing keg stands and drinking alcohol.

In 2013, we are in an age when women make up 51% of the workforce and 50% of medical students. Women cannot be silent as advertising emerges that sends the wrong message about our healthcare choices and us.

As a taxpayer, I am puzzled at why advertising campaigns for health insurance appear to promote high-risk behaviors? Do I as a taxpayer have to cover the consequences of these high-risk behaviors? Does the government agree with this? In an age when many insurance companies risk stratify your premiums based on smoking, obesity, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, where does the government stand on the high-risk behaviors in these ads? Will Americans have to share the costs?

The new health care plan is an opportunity to teach our populations about health responsibility, avoidance of risky behaviors, and promotion of good choices, because our country is shouldering it. Health insurance advertising should promote responsible behavior, no matter the source of the advertising. Please take a stand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie S. Welch". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Julie Welch, MD
Emergency Medicine Physician and Educator



Susie & Nate
Hot to Trot

got insurance?

Let's Get Physical

OMG, he's hot!
Let's hope he's as easy to get as this birth control. My health insurance covers the pill, which means all I have to worry about is getting him between the covers.* I got insurance.

Now you can too.

thanks
obamacare!



#GotInsurance
doyougotinsurance.com

*The pill doesn't protect you from STDs, condoms and common sense do that.