



HEALTH CHECK FIGHTS BACK

Re: "Label wars," Fall 2011.

I was confused and disappointed with the column by Dr. Yoni Freedhoff regarding the Guiding Stars front-of-package system being piloted in four Loblaw stores in Toronto. Rather than presenting a balanced review of this new player in point-of-purchase food information programs

in Canada, the article became an unbalanced and misinformed attack on the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Health Check program.

It is not Health Check's intention to criticize Guiding Stars and we support the program's intention of providing guidance to Canadians in the grocery store. That said, the two programs take a different approach and it is misleading to compare them directly. There also were some factual errors in the article and some obvious omissions. For example, Guiding Stars does not apply the same formula to all foods, as stated by Dr. Freedhoff. This was confirmed in the release of the program's criteria in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* (Nov./Dec. 2011).

The article also overlooked the strengths of the Health Check program. It is the only independent and neutral national food information program in the country that works directly with both grocery manufacturers and restaurants and challenges them to meet strict

criteria and identify healthier options. In addition, Health Check includes a robust and longstanding consumer education component.

— Terry Dean, Director, Health Check, Ottawa

A QUESTION ASKED TOO LATE

Re: "What else could it be?" Summer 2011.

About 11 years ago, my sister started to experience pain in her upper back and shoulder, which she wrote off to a pulled muscle from lifting boxes. The doctors confirmed this, and as the months went by, she tried everything from pain killers and physiotherapy to home remedies, yet nothing seemed to work.

Within a year, she was hunched over, having a hard time standing up straight and in constant pain. The doctors could not find anything wrong and eventually she was checked into a psychiatric ward. A few months later, she developed a very bad chest cold, and after X-rays, they found fluid on her lungs. This led to tests, which uncovered lung cancer cells.

Though still in pain, once diagnosed, she was energized as now she knew what she was up against and could fight it. After a very long battle — chemo, remission, home remedies, radiation — she lost the fight but in hindsight, I think that had we and her doctors continued to ask the "what else" question, she might still be with us.

The lesson to us as a family has been always to ask that big question of yourself and of your health-care providers and make sure the person you are working with understands you.

Thank you for your editorial and your magazine! It's nice to have something enjoyable to read that is also informative.

— Debby Doucette, Moncton, N.B.

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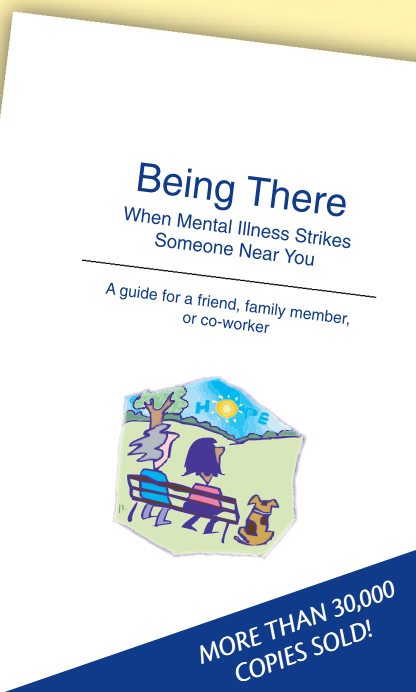
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"This is an excellent, medically sound resource in the management of mental illness."

ANTHONY LEVITT
Psychiatrist in Chief, Sunnybrook Health Centre and Women's College Hospital

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