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GPs call for healthy advertising to children

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice, today urged the advertising industry to take a leadership role in encouraging children to adopt healthier lifestyles.

"I welcome the comments of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, highlighting the strong influence that advertising has over young people," Dr Walters said.

"The advertising industry has an important role to play in educating and informing young people about diet and lifestyle choices.

"ADGP research has found that over 99% of all food advertising during children's television viewing periods is for food with little nutritional value, such as confectionary, take away foods and soft drink.

"In fact a child watching two and a half hours of television a day is exposed to an average of 68 advertising messages a week encouraging them to eat junk food.

"The high level of junk food advertising on television gives children a distorted view about nutrition and makes it more difficult for parents, doctors and schools to teach children healthy eating habits.

"ADGP has previously called on the advertising and food manufacturing industries to take responsibility for their influence over children and young people through voluntarily restricting their advertising to television programs targeting adults.

"A voluntary restriction on advertising junk food during children's television programs would reduce the exposure of young people to messages promoting junk food and would give some support to parents trying to teach their children healthy eating habits.

"I welcome the decision taken by leading fast food retailer McDonalds to provide healthier alternatives to their standard menu and to reduce their advertising targeted at children.

"I would like to think that McDonalds' voluntary initiative will encourage other food manufacturers and advertisers to follow their example and use their influence over children to promote the benefits of good nutrition and an active lifestyle.

"ADGP also looks forward to seeing the healthy lifestyles campaign, currently being developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers and Commercial Television Australia.

"GPs play an important role in giving Australian children a healthy start to life. ADGP and the Divisions of General Practice will continue to advocate for measures that will reduce the rate of obesity among Australian children and improve their health and well being," Dr Walters said.

For comment:

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