

Sept. 4, 2014

Public Citizen Urges FTC to Investigate the Advertising of HealthFair's Cardiovascular Disease Screening Packages

HealthFair's Advertising and Promotional Materials Appear Deceptive, Contain Unsubstantiated Medical Claims

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Public Citizen today called on the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate the direct-to-consumer advertising and promotional activities of the cardiovascular disease screening company HealthFair. The company's advertising materials make unsubstantiated claims about the medical benefits of its screening packages and omit information about the risks of adverse health-related outcomes and financial harms that may result from the screenings, Public Citizen said in its [letter to the FTC](#).

According to HealthFair's website and print solicitations mailed directly to consumers, the company claims that its cardiovascular disease screenings have saved thousands of lives since 1998 and prevented approximately 1,000 heart attacks and strokes annually. These statements are misleading because HealthFair does not have evidence from well-controlled clinical tests proving that the screening tests save lives and prevent heart attacks and strokes in the general population its solicitations target. The FTC generally has required such evidence for those types of medical claims.

In addition, HealthFair's advertising and promotional materials omit important information such as the type of individuals for whom certain cardiovascular screening tests are appropriate, evidence-based guidelines describing if and when such tests should be performed, and the risks of cardiovascular disease screening, particularly indiscriminate screening as promoted by HealthFair.

"The FTC Act prohibits advertisements that contain false or misleading representations or material omissions. HealthFair has violated these prohibitions in its advertisements and promotional materials," said Dr. Michael Carome, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group. "The company's materials have duped large numbers of consumers into undergoing unnecessary and inappropriate cardiovascular disease screening tests, thereby exposing them to risks of physical, psychological and financial harms that can result from false positive screening tests, overdiagnosis and overtreatment. Given the scope of HealthFair's operations, it is imperative that the FTC investigate."

In June, Public Citizen sent [letters](#) to 20 hospitals and health care institutions urging them to sever their relationships with HealthFair. Since then:

Three hospitals have signaled that they have terminated or plan to terminate their partnership with the company: Memorial Healthcare System in Hollywood, Fla.; Dignity Health-California Hospital Medical Center in Los Angeles, Calif.; and Dignity Health-St. Bernadine Medical Center in San Bernardino, Calif.

The American College of Cardiology and American College of Physicians have come out in support of Public Citizen's position.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force issued an updated recommendation against screening the general population for asymptomatic carotid artery stenosis in the general population to prevent strokes, one of the screening tests widely promoted by HealthFair.

Public Citizen asked The Joint Commission to investigate whether HealthFair or its partners ever misled consumers to believe that HealthFair was accredited by The Joint Commission when it was not. Mark R. Chassin, president and chief executive officer of The Joint Commission, issued a statement saying that the commission would contact all hospitals and health care organizations partnered with HealthFair, inform them that HealthFair is no longer accredited, and request that they revise their promotional materials accordingly.

Public Citizen today sent [follow-up letters](#) to all of the hospitals outlining those developments and again urging those hospitals and health care institutions that still have a partnership with HealthFair to sever their ties with the company.

Seven of these hospitals and health care institutions are affiliated with medical schools, and two others have family medicine residency programs. In its letters to these nine institutions, Public Citizen stated that their mission and obligation as academic medical organizations to teach medical students and medical residents the most up-to-date, evidence-based medical practice is incompatible with their sponsorship and promotion of HealthFair's non-evidence based cardiovascular disease screening programs.

"We applaud those hospitals that have made the right choice to sever their relationships with

OUR EXPERTS

Learn more about our policy experts.

Media Contacts

Angela Bradbery, Director of Communications

w. (202) 588-7741

c. (202) 503-6768

abradbery@citizen.org, [Twitter](#)

Barbara Holzer, Broadcast Manager

w. (202) 588-7716

bholzer@citizen.org

Karilyn Gower, Press Officer

w. (202) 588-7779

kgower@citizen.org

Other Important Links

[Press Release Database](#)

[Citizen Vox blog](#)

[Texas Vox blog](#)

[Consumer Law and Policy blog](#)

[Energy Vox blog](#)

[Eyes on Trade blog](#)

[Facebook/publiccitizen](#)

Follow us on Twitter

Tweets

Follow



Tony Leys

@tonyleys

4m

.@Public_Citizen applauds Iowa hospitals' decision to stop using "fear-mongering" mobile heart-scanning service. dmreg.co/1rOD2MU

Retweeted by Public Citizen

Expand



Public Citizen

@Public_Citizen

6m

Public Citizen Urges FTC to Investigate the Advertising of HealthFair's Cardiovascular Disease Screening Packages bit.ly/1AazYJw



Public Citizen

@Public_Citizen

1h

Tweet to @Public_Citizen

HealthFair,” said Carome. “Hospitals that promote HealthFair’s screening programs do a great disservice to the communities that they serve and to public health more broadly. We hope more hospitals will act swiftly to end their contracts.”

Read the [letter](#) to the FTC.

The 20 [letters](#) were sent to hospitals and health care institutions in Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio and Virginia. View a list of the hospitals and health care institutions.

###