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Joan Claybrook, President

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A new organization is born:  
American Merchandising Association?

A decision by the AMA's Board of Trustees to allow the organization to continue its program to insert the AMA logo and AMA information into various consumer health products and not to fire the AMA Vice-Presidents responsible for this debacle (Executive Vice President Dr. P. John Seward and Vice President for Marketing Larry Jellen) would show extremely bad judgement compounding the poor judgement by those who set up the original version of this marketing scheme.

To give such a program the green light as long as the endorsements are not exclusive and as long as AMA's financial windfall is lessened is to distinguish between prostitution with an exclusive high-priced client and more generalized prostitution with a lower price-per-trick but a willingness to sell out to almost anybody. The deal with Sunbeam, for example, was made somewhat blindly with a company whose blood pressure monitors---one of the nine product categories comprising the AMA deal---were far from the best.

An examination of the results of tests, originally published in *Consumer Reports* in October 1996, reveals that of two Sunbeam blood pressure monitors evaluated, one was rated the worst out of 11 models tested. Its numerical score, on a scale of 0 to 100 was approximately 45 with the top-rated monitor (AND UA-767) scoring about 95. Specific *Consumer Reports* comments on the bottom-ranked Sunbeam model included: "Accuracy and consistency are fair....Rigid material at edges of cuff may pinch skin. **Recommendation: There are better choices.**" The other was rated only sixth best, and although described as having "very good accuracy," was topped by five products with "excellent accuracy."

The AMA has a history of hanging on to Executive Vice Presidents and marketing directors long after it has become clear that they are seriously damaging the organization by their defective judgements. According to the *AMA News* (July 7, 1997), a recent predecessor of Dr. Seward's, Dr. James Sammons, was forced to resign as AMA Executive Vice-President in 1990 because of a financial scandal. Similarly, AMA's marketing department, under previous leadership, had cooked up a scheme to charge drug companies as much as \$50,000 to put the AMA logo on articles favorable to the drug companies and send out copies to hundreds of thousands of doctors. At one point, the deal was even to have included articles which had been rejected from the AMA's own journals.

If the AMA Board of Trustees is unable to at least attenuate the enormous damage the current marketing scandal has already done to the organization by entirely--not cosmetically--stopping the program and firing Dr. Seward and Mr. Jellen, I would urge the hundreds of thousands of ethical American physicians who belong to the AMA to vote with their feet and resign from this dying organization. AMA membership has already fallen from almost 75% of doctors 30 years ago to fewer than 40% now and this kind of dangerous and embarrassing behavior by the AMA can only hasten the demise of a once-proud organization.

Ralph Nader, Founder

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