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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This past autumn my wife and I traveled to Tuscany for a short vacation, where we met many interesting new friends. Without resorting to tired national stereotypes, I feel that a few broad observations can be made about some of the people we encountered. Our Italian hosts, for instance, were consistently warm and inviting, while many of the English folks we met made us smile with their wry humor. No one, however, was more obvious than our fellow Americans, and we could usually pick them out without saying a word. For the Americans were inevitably the fattest people in the room.

Obesity has become one of the most alarming and most talked-about issues in American public life. The topic has graced covers of national magazines, been featured on television shows across the country, and has troubled physicians and public health workers from coast to coast who struggle to address this growing problem. This edition's Guest Editor, P. K. Newby, skillfully brings all the resources that she and the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* can bear on the problem. In this issue we are given perspectives from medicine, law, science, and public health, as well as the more unusual viewpoint of an industry often at the forefront of blame for this national problem. Specifically, Newby and her authors bring questions of obesity to focus on children, partially because that is where the problems seem most dire and partly, at least, because that is where all the writers in this symposium feel the most constructive work can be done. Children's weight is clearly a result not only of diet and exercise but more specifically of what they are offered for food in schools, how foods are marketed to them in the media, and how children are able to function in the "built environment" that exists around them. All three of these areas, in turn, are ones that can conceivably be changed through work in government and legislation, be it at the federal, state, or local level. Newby and her team of writers broadly agree that if the obesity epidemic is eventually going to be halted here in the United States, it must begin with the children, who are products, in many ways, of the environment and culture that surrounds them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health organizations have already recognized that obesity is among the most dangerous and costly health issues facing Americans today, and that it is a problem that is growing exponentially worse. As scholars of law, medicine, and ethics, it is our duty to face this epidemic together and use our unique perspectives and experiences to forge a solution that will work for all of our children.

Ted Hutchinson
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