



## Paula Deen's Dickey Dance as a Diabetes Drug Spokesperson

January 29, 2012 by *Patrick A. Malone*

Most people understand that TV chef Paula Deen's brand of cuisine is to healthful eating as channel-surfing is to exercise. There's nothing wrong with her high-fat, high-sugar recipes, as long as you follow the rule, "Everything in moderation."

But when Deen chose to keep her diabetes secret from her public for three years, then burst onto the Big Pharma promotional scene with the announcement not only of her disease, but her new status as a pitchwoman for the diabetes drug Victoza, the flag of hypocrisy is raised.

In a commentary published in the [Los Angeles Times](#), writer Karen Stabiner outlines the dangers of Deen's consumer seduction. "... [T]he media storm surrounding the news of her illness is exactly the sort of publicity bonanza the pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk must have dreamed of when it hired Deen ... for its new marketing campaign. It's Deen's job, along with her sons, to help us see 'Diabetes in a new light,' according to the company's website. ... 'Live a life that's delicious.'

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It sounds like so much fun; almost makes you want to sign up for Type 2 diabetes. Surely Deen fans with the disease will start asking their doctors if the \$500-a-month Novo Nordisk drug she takes might be right for them, not because they need a new medication but because it will catapult them to one degree of separation from Deen — which is, after all, what celebrity endorsements are all about.”

The **Food and Drug Administration has rules about celebrities flogging prescription drugs**. The commercial has to put the financial connection into the fine print of the ad, and the commercial also has to fairly state all the downsides of the drug. But try to keep track of what's said as this information rushes by at the end of the commercial.

**Novo Nordisk, the maker of Victoza, has a new Paula Deen website** that shows what the required information will include once it trots out Deen in actual ads.

Among other things, the website tells us: "Victoza® is not recommended as first-line therapy for patients who have inadequate glycemic [blood sugar] control on diet and exercise." It also says: "Victoza® is not a substitute for insulin. ... The concurrent use of Victoza® and insulin has not been studied."

So it makes you wonder what exactly Victoza is good for. Paula Deen surely will tell us.

Diabetes is a life-threatening disease whose complicated treatment **we described** recently. As Stabiner points out, it remains a huge, expensive American health-care issue.

- More than 25 million Americans—more than 8 in 100 people—have diabetes; at the current diagnosis rate, 1 in 3 Americans will have it by 2050. Most of these cases are Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes for which obesity is the primary 1 risk factor.
- Juvenile and Type 2 diabetes together cost more than \$174 billion annually from medical expenses and lowered productivity.
- The incidence of diabetes has leveled off for the first time in a generation, but only among the privileged; poor and minority populations lack their access to care, but not to inexpensive and ubiquitous fast and processed food, the very diet that promotes obesity.

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Stabiner decries the “delicious” life Deen purports to live, courtesy her expensive pharmaceutical helper. Diabetes is manageable, but only with a commitment to lifestyle changes that might be difficult, but are free. In contrast to the la-dee-da Deen campaign, Stabiner explains how easy it is for a diabetic to endanger himself or herself:

- skip a meal, any meal, any day;
- eat too much or too little of just about anything;
- consume hidden sugar in a restaurant dish;
- eat a spontaneous snack;
- sit on an airplane delayed for departure without having packed a candy bar;
- have a glass of Champagne at a wedding;
- eat one too many isn't-fruit-good-for-you strawberries.

The well-managed diabetes life is measured, and difficult. But, Stabiner says, “Novo Nordisk is selling swell, alongside drug companies that promise to medicate away depression, gas, incontinence, clogged arteries and fibromyalgia. ...

”Support and encouragement is one thing, but what we're being sold is magical thinking. In the battle between health-care reality and fantasy, Paula Deen is small potatoes ... but what she represents matters: another attempt to market immortality to a culture that's particularly in love with misbehaving, followed by an easy fix.”

Not everything can be fixed with a pill. Most things shouldn't be, and although you're a rightfully popular personality, Ms. Deen, to suggest otherwise is misleading.

If you want the facts and not the fluff about diabetes, link to the website[[www.diabetes.org/](http://www.diabetes.org/)] of the American Diabetes Association. Link [here](#) to learn about drug support and prescription discount programs.

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