

October 27, 2015

Ms Deborah Altschuler

President, National Pediculosis Association

1005 Boylston St STE 343

Newton, MA 02461

Dear Ms Altschuler,

I would like to offer my most sincere apology for the grossly misquoted comments that were attributed to me in the Washington Post article by Lyndsey Layton on October 24. I am definitely not a mean-spirited person, and I was deeply embarrassed to see those comments in print, quoted as though I had said them. I know over the years that, as a spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics, we have not seen eye-to-eye on this issue, but those comments as printed were blatantly insulting, and that was certainly not my intention. Please let me explain.

The reporter asked what criteria the American Academy of Pediatrics used to back up their statement about head lice, and I explained that we review all the recent literature and studies done on the topic worldwide, and base our statement on evidence. She then asked what evidence the National Pediculosis Association used, and I replied that as far as I could tell, they were concerned parents who recommended what they thought would work best. I commented that it is upsetting to parents to have to deal with a head lice infestation, and could very easily see parents focusing on that if they weren't distracted by other health and family problems. However, as of our most recent review, there is no other country in the world that supports a "no nits" policy, and no evidence that any school district or community actually eradicated lice by having a "no nits" policy.

I continue to be concerned that children in families stressed with other more overwhelming issues are missing out on needed school time (for many of them, the most important and normal part of their lives) if they go to a school that has a "no nits" policy, because there is just not the capacity to remove all the nits by the next school day. It is often not a simple issue of the parent or guardian being unwilling to take the responsibility.

Everyone is aware that the current over-the-counter products available for lice (namely, permethrin and pyrethrins, available since the 1980's) are not as effective as when they were first introduced. We knew this would happen eventually, because insects, like bacteria, develop resistance over time. New products that have been carefully tested and proven to be safe and effective are available. I do worry that the NPA could be doing children and families a disservice by implying that all products are somehow unsafe. Parents go to the NPA website and trust that the information there is 100% correct. (In this day and age, many parents seem to prefer advice from other parents than their doctor!) Parents should have a choice to just comb out if they wish to and have the time (or money to pay someone else to do it), and get their child back to school the next day. But it worries me that some parents may be scared away from treatments that could be more effective in certain circumstances.

All this being said, I still deeply regret the way my comments were interpreted and written in the article. I certainly admire the NPA for the way you have been able to capture and hold the attention of the public on the topic of head lice for all these years. (And I do send patients to the website if they need advice on combing out.) I think we will always have to agree to disagree. I do regret that over the years I have not made more of an effort to engage your energy and perhaps be able to come to a compromise over some of these issues. Maybe I have always been a bit intimidated by the one time I heard you speak (many years ago!), at a school nurse meeting in Newport, VT. You were a tough act to follow! I remember you had the audience standing and chanting something like "no more lice!" I know that you and I can certainly agree on that!

Peace!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barb Frankowski". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Barbara Frankowski, MD, MPH, FAAP