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Dear Dr. Adams,

Over half of Americans alive today are destined to die a vascular death. The tragedy is that the vast majority of vascular deaths are preventable, as they are caused by our diet and exercise habits. The epidemic of obesity in our young people will be followed by a more serious epidemic of diabetes and then an even more devastating epidemic of heart attack and sudden death. The medical system in the United States is ill equipped to handle this increase in cardiac events so it is mandatory that we develop a more robust system of prevention.

As a preventive cardiologist I feel strongly that omega 3 fatty acids play a critical role in protection from vascular events. For this reason I support the Health Claim Petition stating that diets including walnuts can reduce the risk of heart disease (Docket 02P-0292).

There are strong evidence-based data indicating that walnuts reduce cholesterol. It is well documented that cholesterol lowering from any cause is associated with a decrease in cardiac events. Also, in the Physicians' Health Study, analysis of mixed nut intake showed a huge reduction in sudden death with just two one-ounce servings per week. Similar results have been seen with fish oil intake, and the omega 3 fatty acids found in both fish and nuts (especially walnuts) are thought to stabilize the heart rhythm and help prevent the electrical abnormalities that kill most victims within the first hours of their heart attack.

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Walnuts specifically stand out from other tree nuts and legumes as having a high concentration of omega 3 fatty acids. They are also high in fiber and other nutrients, so their interplay with the human body is complex. However, they have been shown to be safe when ingested in normal amounts so there is little concern of toxicity.

I have found that recommending walnuts to my patients is a very clear health signal to them. While I also discuss fish, fruits and vegetables, these are more vague categories that require explanation, such as what types of fish are best, and how to prepare them. Once introduced, walnuts speak for themselves.

While vascular disease is now an epidemic in the United States, the public is rapidly becoming more aware of the need to change dietary habits. Our culture, however, is still pushing us into poor food choices, and the average citizen has difficulty finding the right answers, though the scientific evidence is there. We need clear guideposts as to what foods to choose and what to avoid. Your approval of labeling that walnuts can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease would be a benefit to the public and to healthcare.

Sincerely,



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