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IMAGES IN PAEDRIATRICS

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Mixed messages

Figure 1 The vending machine next to information on diabetes.

Health promotion, an objective of most hospitals, can be compromised by commercial or other interests. The consumption of fizzy drinks, especially those with a high sugar content, is known to be harmful to childrens' health. There are also strong associations with tooth decay and obesity, the latter being linked to an increase in diabetes and cardiac disease in the adult population.¹

Less well known is the interaction of acidic drinks with some drugs, most

notably carbamazepine, which is an anticonvulsant commonly used in paediatric practice.² There is also an association with fizzy drink consumption and reduced bone mineral density in girls, which may be related to these drinks displacing milk in the diet.³

Increasingly, machines dispensing soft drinks are being introduced into schools with the expected consequences.⁴

The vending machine shown in fig 1, which was in a local paediatric unit, was placed beside the outpatient waiting area.

There were no healthy alternative drinks available. Waiting children were drawn to this machine and often demanded these drinks from their parents. Ironically it is strategically placed close to notice boards advocating healthy eating and diabetes awareness.

It has, finally, been removed following the closure of the adjacent inpatient ward.

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