



January 25, 2008

Mr. Tom Calderone
President
VH1

Dear Mr. Calderone:

This letter is to raise some issues with you and to attempt some dialogue around your recent production "Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew." We have followed the development of this program with interest and have been able to review a number of articles which were written on the program. It was our hope that this program would raise the awareness of the disease of addiction and of the treatment which is available. Unfortunately, like a lot of other productions, the end product seems to have emphasized the sensationalism as opposed to the reality of the disease and the treatment. Since the show has been aired, our concerns about the show and its impact have heightened, not lessened.

The National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers is a trade association which represents well over 300 organizations that provide addiction treatment across the country. Providing addiction treatment, working with persons and family members afflicted with the disease of addiction is the business of our members. They know first hand, day after day, the reality of treatment. It is our belief that the show takes advantage of and uses people in deep distress because of their addiction as a way to draw in viewers. I can't think of another illness for which we would dramatize the struggles of individuals in such a graphic fashion. To have singled out only the persons with some "celebrity" status is not only a disservice to the other persons with this disease, but it also tends to trivialize the treatment process.

We don't have reality shows called "Celebrity Cancer with Dr. First Name Only" or "Celebrity Diabetes with Dr. First Name Only." That's because, as a society, we still have a long way to go with regard to treating people with addiction like people with other illnesses. Your program will not help change public attitudes. As a matter of fact, it will set back public understanding of addiction and recovery and further stigmatize individuals with this medical condition. It reinforces myths about who struggles with addiction and the inability of individuals to really recover from addiction.

The show promos and the show itself were edited to artificially heighten the drama in a way that serves only to sensationalize addiction and the behavior of those on the program. At times it was hard to tell what was real and what was the "reality show." The repeated showing of the footage of the ambulance pulling up to the treatment center, frequent shots of Jeff Conaway slumped over in his wheel chair and Mary Carey striking sexual poses was simply exploitative. The fact that the individuals on the show are celebrities makes this situation even more problematic. Your host has acknowledged in media interviews that because they are celebrities, they have personality traits that drive them to seek fame, even in the depths of their addiction. Addiction should not be a commercial, audience-grabbing pursuit.

The unfortunate fact is that in most of America, when people receive treatment for addiction, it's not in the fantastic facilities where Dr. Pinsky practices. Most people receive treatment in programs that are far less "pampering" to the patients and where they have peers from all walks of life. Still others receive treatment in publicly funded programs. Insurance discrimination makes it difficult for persons to access treatment in ways similar to other diseases. That's because private health insurance companies discriminate against people with addiction by denying them coverage or charging higher co-pays and deductibles. The show is

setting up a dangerous, false reality for most of America and may in fact set back our efforts to change this discriminatory system.

We believe that when people see this show, they'll wonder why they should help people with addiction and why people should get insurance coverage for their care. And that's a real problem. We still don't require insurance companies to cover addiction and mental illness like other health problems. That's why Congress is considering the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act, a bill that would require insurance companies to provide coverage for addiction like other health problems.

We need to stop sensationalizing people who are still struggling with addiction and get help to the over 22 million Americans who have yet to experience the reality of long-term recovery, which is enjoyed by millions of Americans and their families. People do get recovery and their lives, and the lives of their families, are better as a result.

We urge you to take the following steps to put a little reality into "Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew":

1. Open and close the show with Dr. Pinsky making an affirmative statement about the many effective treatments available to people still struggling with addiction and the reality of long-term recovery from addiction. We would be happy to work with your staff to draft such a statement.
2. Provide information on your Web site about the many ways that people can get help to recover from addiction, including mutual support groups, medication-assisted treatment, professional treatment, and faith, including links to the federal government's Treatment Locator.
3. Add a crawl during the show promoting the link to your Web site for more information on where people can seek help.

We look forward to hearing back from you about the steps that you will be taking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald J. Hunsicker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R' at the beginning.

Ronald J. Hunsicker, D. Min., FACATA
President/CEO