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Mark Masselli: This is Conversations on Health Care. I am Mark Masselli.

Margaret Flinter: And I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: Well Margaret, it's May 2012, and you know 40 years ago, this month, the Community Health Center was founded when a group of Wesleyan University students and Middletown community activists came together to help their families, friends, and neighbors access affordable and quality health care.

Margaret Flinter: The driving mission, health care as a right and not a privilege, still stands by the Health Center today, and we have continued to fill that need just as the need has grown. And certainly, we have seen an enormous amount of change in health care delivery and public health during that time but still, health care is a right not a privilege.

Mark Masselli: We have, Margaret. And now, here we are in a new era of dramatic reforms to health care. It's an exciting time to have the privilege of serving this basic human need of quality health care for all of our citizens. It's what we do in our daily lives and that's the message of this show. And to mark our 40th, we are pleased to be cutting the ribbon on a brand new facility on Main Street in Middletown, it's a state-of-the-art, patient-centered primary care facility built with the highest environmental standards.

Margaret Flinter: Well Mark, I have always thought Main Street on Middletown was a metaphor that if we can do it on Main Street here, it can be done on main street anywhere. And it's exciting to see this all come to fruition Mark and so many people came together to make it happen. But I know this is going to be an incredible contribution to health care in our community and a welcoming place for all who seek high quality primary care and especially, as we move through this era of health care reform with the country poised to see access to health care for all citizens if the Affordable Care Act stands.

Mark Masselli: The passage of the Affordable Care Act has been a monumental leap forward, even though some or all of its directors could be in jeopardy as we await the Supreme Court's decision on the legality of the measure.

Margaret Flinter: Well, it's certainly going to be a landmark decision, Mark, whatever it is. And I am hopeful that the High Court will support it and support the individual mandate that requires all Americans to carry insurance. I think we have heard over and over from many guests on this show that's a foundational element of the Massachusetts law that's really worked and helped them get very close to universal coverage.

Mark Masselli: And you know, we have been very focused in on the show around chronic diseases and one particular health scourge continues to loom large in this country, Margaret, obesity. Two-thirds of Americans are obese or overweight, 25 million Americans already have Type-II diabetes, and 75 million have pre-diabetes directly related to the obesity epidemic. As are numerous other health concerns like heart disease and cancer, we see the devastating impact of obesity everyday in our practice.

Margaret Flinter: And Mark, it really is the number one threat at this point to the public's health. So, our guest today is John Hoffman, Vice President of HBO Documentaries. Now, HBO is launching a four-part documentary series in May on obesity and doing it as a public health project, produced in conjunction with the Institute of Medicine, National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. The nation is really a sweeping public health initiative. Hopefully, that will get the conversation going as a nation about the solutions to this incredible threat to our health.

Mark Masselli: We will also be hearing from FactCheck.org's Lori Robertson who looks at a rumor attached to the Affordable Care Act that some say will add an extra tax on the sale of your home.

Margaret Flinter: And no matter what the topic, you can find all of our shows by Googling CHC Radio.

Mark Masselli: And if you have any comments, email us at www.chcradio.com, we would love to hear from you. We will get to HBO's John Hoffman in just a moment, but first, here is our producer, Marianne O'Hare, with this week's Headline News.

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Marianne O'Hare: I am Marianne O'Hare with this Headline News. The battle over women's health continues in the State of Texas where a U.S. Appeals Court ruled yesterday the state could exclude Planned Parenthood from the Women's Health Program, claiming the states have the right to refuse financial support to an organization that supports abortion services. The Woman's Health Program is part of the state Medicaid program that serves the underserved in Texas, about 100,000 women served, 40,000 of them served by Planned Parenthood. The U.S. Court of Appeals decision reverses a lower court ruling that ruled in favor of Planned Parenthood, which receives Federal Medicaid funds to provide basic health and cancer screenings to uninsured or underinsured women in Texas. The Obama Administration has said it will cut off funding to Texas for refusing the Medicaid Funds for Planned Parenthood.

The battle over rising interest rates on student loans is playing out in the health care arena. The House passed a measure earlier this week to keep student loan

interest rates from rising this year but voted to take the \$6 billion needed to make up the difference from money slated for preventive care under the Affordable Care Act. Politicians from both sides of the aisle claiming brinksmanship, democratic leadership, say the money should come from billing wealthier citizens on a payroll or Social Security and Medicare tax to make up the difference. The White House is threatening to veto the measure that takes money from preventive health care funds if it makes it to the President's desk.

Facebook and survival, the two could be a perfect match. Everyday, 18 people die in this country awaiting an organ donation, and registering organ donors has proven allusive. Mark Zuckerberg to the rescue. He sees his Facebook as a perfect platform on which to state your intention to become an organ donor and figures with 50% of Americans already using this social media site, the Facebook Organ Donor Campaign could yield millions of potential new registered organ donors. I am Marianne O'Hare with this Headline News.

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Mark Masselli: We are speaking today with Vice President of HBO Documentary Films, the Emmy Award-winning John Hoffman. He is also the Executive Producer of Weight of the Nation, a four-part series and large scale public health campaign on obesity epidemic in this country to be presented by HBO and the Institute of Medicine, which takes place throughout the month of May. Mr. Hoffman, welcome to Conversations on Health Care.

John Hoffman: Thank you. I am glad to be here.

Mark Masselli: John, you have used the power of television documentaries to spotlight a number of issues that are plaguing the health and well-being of the country. You have produced a documentary series on addiction and Alzheimer's disease in the past. Tell us about the decision to now use the power of your medium to focus in on one of the biggest health challenges we are facing as a nation, the growing epidemic of obesity.

John Hoffman: Well, I think that positioning it as this growing epidemic is the reason why more than two-thirds of the nation is overweight or obese, the rate of obesity amongst children is triple what it was 30 years ago, and the health consequences of carrying too much weight, whether you are overweight or obese, are very significant. And as we came to understand that more and more, we felt that we really needed to use our platform and our position in the media to inform people that these consequences are serious, not only for the nation, but for themselves as individuals.

Margaret Flinter: And this partnership with the Institute of Medicine in your current work seems to me a really important one. Tell us about that partnership. How did you come to be in partnership with the Institute of Medicine on this

project and what was the Institute of Medicine saying about the health consequences of obesity?

John Hoffman: Well thanks for asking that because it is a very important relationship. And the back story is that for the addiction project and the Alzheimer's project, those were causing co-presentations between HBO and the National Institutes of Health. And when we decided to focus on obesity, I think I will say that I was naïve to think that we would bring people hope through telling them about advances in basic research in science. And we soon learned that the factors that are driving this epidemic are far more complex than we thought and that means the food that we grow, the food that we manufacture and the food that we market and many more factors. But it was Institute of Medicine that really began tying all these contributors together in some of their reports that we came to see really changed the dialogue. There is one in particular in 2006; they issued a report on the marketing of unhealthy foods to children and the link between that and obesity. And so that's the role that the Institute of Medicine can play is really this independent voice in the area of public health research medicine that advises the nation on issues of critical importance. IOM, Institute of Medicine, as part of the National Academy of Sciences was chartered by Abraham Lincoln so that there would be this independent body that would advise the President and Congress of issues of critical importance.

And so the IOM is really fearless the way they use our independence to ask the hard question. So they are the perfect partner for us when it comes to talking about obesity because some very, very hard questions have to be asked about the choices that we are making in our society. But, because obesity is a medical problem, and because it's affecting so many Americans, our partners are also the NIH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mark Masselli: Well that's a great lineup of strategic partners and as you said--

John Hoffman: It's historic. They have never all come together to work on a project.

Mark Masselli: As you indicated, the epidemic is just growing daily with about 70% of American adults being overweight or obese, and I think the more disturbing numbers, about a 3rd of the nation's children are in that category and that's obviously having an enormous impact on the next generation who might live shorter lives than their parents. And as you said, you have talked to a lot of people, great practitioners and leaders in the field. Tell us what you came to understand about why it's so difficult to get a handle on the obesity epidemic.

John Hoffman: I think the most surprising thing for me was to understand that the systems that developed through evolution for the preference for high caloric foods, foods high in fat, foods high in sugar, are extremely powerful. That is what ensured our survival. Our genetics have not changed in any important way in the

last 150,000 years. Eating and the ability to store food as fat meant survival and so those systems are still alive in us today. And if we evolved into a world of want and now we are living in a world of plenty, then you have a mismatch between our genetics and the world we are living in. And when I came to really understand how powerful those systems are, it really helped me to really change my view about people who are overweight and struggle with that weight problem because their body is doing what it's supposed to be doing, it's holding on to calories. There was no system that ever developed for sort of measuring how much fat we were storing because there was no reason to. We almost never had enough.

Margaret Flinter: John, I can hear in your voice how powerful this new information was for you. Tell us about these ongoing initiatives as part of the quest to get the nation more involved or activated if you will in the obesity discussion.

John Hoffman: Our goal with these public health campaigns is to lower every barrier that we can between the content and the public. So there are the cable systems and satellite operators that are opting in to open their signal so that you don't have to be a subscriber to see the series on May 14th and 15th. All the material, the four-part series, plus an additional 12 short films that are deeper dives into the connection between obesity and heart disease or obesity and diabetes, because of the generous support that we have with our two other partners, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, and Kaiser Permanente, there is a massive distribution of 40,000 screening kits of all the content I just described plus discussion guides for librarians, for teachers, to use, to order and receive for free this gift so that they can use these materials in community settings to educate their constituents, to give them access to this content to bring in local experts and have an event.

Mark Masselli: We are speaking today with John Hoffman, Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker and Executive Producer of HBO's upcoming four-part series, *Weight of the Nation*, which was produced in conjunction with the Institute of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health and the CDC. John, in addition to all those that you mentioned, you also have written a book that's just been released by St. Martin's Press, *The Weight of the Nation- To Win, We Have to Lose*. Tell us a little bit about the book and some of the results that you are hoping to see from that. I take it's in tandem with the other toolkit items that you are releasing.

John Hoffman: The reason that we did a book is that there is a consumer that is interested in achieving a healthy weight. So we feel that it's important to speak to the American consumer that is interested in achieving a healthy weight and bring them the most reliable evidence-based information about what it takes to achieve that healthy weight. And a healthy weight for many people is just losing 7% to 10% of their current body weight. So if you weigh 200 pounds, that's 14 to 20

pounds that you need to lose. You don't need to lose 50 to 100 pounds to receive so many of the health benefits. But even that small amount of weight loss is hard for people. 98% of people regain the weight they lost within 5 years of their weight loss, 98%. People have got to understand how powerful those systems are and we felt the need to create a book that didn't treat this gently, didn't create false hope in people. It's the anti-diet book because a diet is a short term solution to a lifelong problem. And so we felt it was essential to not speak in general terms about, and sort of platitudes about, what people can expect when they try to lose weight. It's hard work and lifelong commitment to a whole renovation of your life. It's something that people have to understand is what it takes.

Margaret Flinter: John, you recently spoke about the upcoming documentary when you were at the TEDMED Conference in Washington and you were certainly in great company with other thought leaders. I am told one of the buzzwords of this year's conference was a relatively newly coined phrased, diabetes. So, clearly, these dual epidemics of obesity and diabetes were on the minds of everybody in health care in the country. And I know you will be part of CDC's Weight of the Nation Conference in early May. What outcomes can we expect in terms of initiatives and policy directives from that CDC Conference that will help achieve these goals of slowing, arresting and reversing the obesity crisis?

John Hoffman: I am not someone who walks through the halls of government. But I will say that until we make it a priority to really reform very large systems in our society, until we really look critically at the foods we are growing, that make up the raw commodities in the foods that we are manufacturing, I don't think that we are going to make progress in this slowing, arresting and reversing of obesity. All you need to do is look at the charts that we lay out in the fourth episode called Challenges of the Weight of the Nation of the corn production in this country, the soy that turns into soy oil. Soy oil now represents 20% of the calories of the American diet. You look at the cheese consumption; you look at the beef consumption, and they all are having the same trend, they are all going up. So everything is going up and the price of corn and soy is going down at the same time. You have this formula for this increase in the calories that are being consumed by Americans. The average American is consuming 300 calories more per day than they were 30 years ago. So that's this inexorable weight gain, you can't separate it from the change in the American diet.

Mark Masselli: Can you pull the thread a little on that and talk to us about the food industry's sort of responsibility here because they are spending billions of dollars each year to develop products, packaging, advertising, marketing to entice all of us to buy more food? How did you deal with the food industry in the context of your Weight of the Nation Program?

John Hoffman: We had the good fortune to work with some economists who have really looked at these issues very seriously on the connections between the foods that we grow and manufacture and obesity. Paul Roberts, who wrote a brilliant book called *The End of Food* argues in the film that if we were to cut 100 calories a day from our diet, that would cost the food industry in this country between \$35 and \$40 billion a year. Companies understandably and rightfully are in business of making money and so every year they need to sell more product to make more money. HBO, myself, we are not in a position of trying to establish what should be the new incentives for the food industry in this country to reform. But unless they do, eventually, it's going to affect their bottom-line because right now, 69% of the nation is overweight or obese and if you have one out of three children born in the year 2000, who will develop diabetes in their lifetime; one out of two of the African-American or Latino will develop diabetes in their lifetime. If a child under the age of 10 develops diabetes, their lifetime will be cut short by 19 years. You are affecting your consumer base. So we have to create some kinds of incentives but it's not my job to decide what those are.

Margaret Flinter: John, we run a national program called Recess Rocks, which is a fun interactive program designed to get kids that 45 minutes of physical activity at school a day. And you have spotlighted some young people who are attempting to make a difference. Tell us about your efforts to reach young people such as the Great Cafeteria Takeover and how that relates to the campaign.

John Hoffman: There are some kids out there who I think know a lot more than adults about how to solve this problem. And we learned about a group in New Orleans called the Rethinkers. It is a group of children from elementary, middle and high schools from all over the Recovery School District, who have had it with the quality of the food being served to them in their cafeterias and they started asking the obvious questions if you care about our health and our future, why would you serve us food that is not good for us. And so we learned about this great group and decided to do a film about them and that's the result is the Great Cafeteria Takeover, where the Rethinkers have graded the quality of the food in a number of the schools throughout the district, they give the schools their grades and they succeeded in getting the food service providers to the table. You will see that they succeed in getting our mark to publicly make a pledge to change the quality of the food and the sourcing of the food that are served to children.

Mark Masselli: John, we like to ask all of our guests this final question. When you look around the country and the world, what do you see in terms of innovation in combating obesity that our listeners at Conversations should be keeping an eye on?

John Hoffman: The fastest growing segment of the agriculture sector is the organic one, is the locally grown one. But it's less than 2% of the food that is eaten in this country. You realize how far we have to go. But, without these farmers, who are I would say holding on to these core values of quality, of

diversity, of sustainability, unless we support them as a small business and to grow, then we are all doomed. It's both the future in terms of a positive story because we have a lot of young people who are getting into agriculture but it's also sort of daunting one to think that many of them will give up if we don't help them.

Margaret Flinter: We have been speaking today with John Hoffman, Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and Executive Producer of HBO's upcoming documentary series and anti-obesity campaign, *Weight of the Nation*, which launches in May. To find out more about the documentary series, go to the theweightofthenation.hbo.com. John, thank you so much for joining us today on Conversations.

John Hoffman: It's my pleasure and thank you for showing the interest.

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Mark Masselli: At Conversations on Health Care, we want our audience to be truly in the know when it comes to the facts about health care reform and policy. Lori Robertson is an award-winning journalist and Managing Editor of FactCheck.org, a non-partisan, non-profit consumer advocate for voters that aim to reduce the level of deception in US politics. Lori, what have you got for us this week?

Lori Robertson: Well, Mark and Margaret, we deal with a lot of viral misinformation at FactCheck.org. And one claim we have seen again and again in chain e-mails is that the Federal Health Care Law puts a 3.8% tax on profits from the sale of your home. But the truth is that there are very few cases where this 3.8% investment tax would apply. It falls on those with high income from other sources and only when profits on a primary residence exceed \$250,000 or \$500,000 in the case of a married couple. So here is how the tax would work. Those high income earners would be subject to it, and as I mentioned, the first \$250,000 in profit or \$500,000 for married couples would be exempt when you are selling a primary residence. But the viral e-mails we have seen, and we have seen them the time right after the law was enacted to right up to now, we just published a new piece on this, the viral e-mails we have seen claim that anyone selling their home would be hit with this tax. That's not true. In fact, the Tax Foundation estimated that the investment tax would affect the top 2% of families when it takes effect in 2013. And that's it for this week. I am Lori Robertson, Managing Editor of FactCheck.org.

Margaret Flinter: FactCheck.org is committed to factual accuracy from the country's major political players and is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

If you have a fact, that you would like checked, e-mail us at www.chcradio.com. We will have FactCheck.org's Lori Robertson check it out for you here on Conversations on Health Care.

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Margaret Flinter: Each week, Conversations highlights a bright idea about how to make wellness a part of our communities and everyday lives.

Mark Masselli: Traditionally, third year medical students are in a whirlwind of stressful experiences, bouncing quickly from specialty to specialty and patient to patient, often having only a single interaction with any given patient in the course of their training. While this model is intended to build experience, it can also have the effect of negatively impacting empathy. A recent study in the Journal of Academic Medicine found some interesting results in a different model for third year med students.

Harvard Medical School has piloted an Integrated Clerkship at Cambridge Health Alliance in which med students actually follow their patients longitudinally for a full year through all of their treatments. The third year students are there when a patient gets cancer diagnosis. They accompany those patients through meetings with surgeons and oncologists, sit with them during chemo and help them navigate the often overwhelming medical system. The study found those students in the Integrated Clerkship felt differently about their medical school experience, which is infamously a time of maximal stress. They saw it as more of humanizing, less marginalizing and even more transformational than their traditional medical school cares. Not only did this program foster increased empathy and satisfaction but these medical students scored just as well as their peers on standardized test. A program that allows young physicians in training a chance to develop a deeper connection to the experience of the patients they will serve, making for a more empathetic medical practitioner, now that's a bright idea.

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Margaret Flinter: This is Conversations on Health Care. I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: And I am Mark Masselli, peace and health.

Conversations on Health Care, broadcast from the campus of Wesleyan University at WESU, streaming live at www.wesufm.org and brought to you by the Community Health Center.