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April 18, 2008

The Honorable Nita Lowey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lowey:

We are pleased to offer the strong support of the American College of Gastroenterology for H. CON. RES. 70, which would designate May as National Celiac Disease Awareness Month. Celiac disease is a chronic digestive disease in which patients suffer from inflammation or irritation in the small intestine that causes difficulties with absorbing nutrients from the diet. As leaders in the diagnosis and treatment of digestive diseases including Celiac Disease (CD), we very much appreciate your leadership and endorse your efforts to raise awareness of CD.

The American College of Gastroenterology is a physician organization representing gastroenterologists and other gastrointestinal specialists. Founded in 1932, the College currently numbers almost 11,000 physicians among its membership of health care providers of gastroenterology specialty care. Although the vast majority of these physicians are gastroenterologists, the College's membership also includes surgeons, pathologists, hepatologists, and other specialists in various aspects of the overall treatment of digestive diseases and conditions. The College has chosen to focus its activities on clinical gastroenterology – the issues confronting the gastrointestinal specialist in treatment of patients. The primary activities of the College have been, and continue to be, educational efforts directed at promoting and optimizing quality care. For example, we have patient information on CD posted on our website at: <http://www.acg.gi.org/patients/gihealth/pdf/celiac.pdf>.

Gastroenterologists are on the front-lines of diagnosing CD. After a blood test, a diagnosis of CD is confirmed by gastroenterologists who take biopsy samples of the small bowel using endoscopy. The only treatment at this time is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet. 2,500,000 people in the U.S. are estimate to have CD but only 1 out of 10 may be actually diagnosed and are aware that they have the disease. As your resolution acknowledges, many suffer needlessly for years before they are correctly diagnosed.

We support your resolution's efforts to increase research funding on CD as well as to encourage earlier detection of this disease, particularly because patients with CD often have other autoimmune disorders and diagnosis of one patient can lead to the diagnosis of others in his or her family.

Again, we appreciate your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you in May and throughout the year on CD and other issues important to gastroenterologists and their patients.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amy Foxx-Orenstein, D.O, FAGG
President

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