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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, *Drive with Ben Davis*, 4BC,
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Subject: Obesity

BEN DAVIS: Alright, doctors: they're pushing for a shock-and-awe campaign to combat the nation's obesity crisis, in the same vein as the photos on packets of smokes. Now, obesity causes more early deaths in Australia than tobacco. I'm going to pause there and let that sink in. We are a nation of fatty boombahs, and it's really piling on the health services. More early deaths in Australia than tobacco.

But I'm wondering if this campaign will work. How will it work? Experts warn that we still don't understand the consequences of obesity-related Type 2 diabetes: limb amputation, blindness, stroke, heart, kidney failure.

Dr Michael Gannon is the President of the AMA, I've got him on the line now. Doc, good afternoon.

MICHAEL GANNON: Good afternoon, Ben.

BEN DAVIS: We know the images worked on cigarettes, on the packets of cigarettes, to lowering those and the smoking rate. You reckon it'll do the same for obesity?

MICHAEL GANNON: I think there's a fair bit of evidence that shock tactics can wane over time, but certainly they have a role. We've got to look at the obesity epidemic and addressing it from a number of different points of view. My comments came out of a Diabetes Queensland report which showed that people just don't, especially young people, don't understand what the word diabetes means, so they don't understand the consequences of it.

In my home state of Western Australia we've had a thing called the LiveLighter campaign, which has quite graphic images of intra-abdominal fats. That's been successful to one extent or another. It's part of the story, it's part of addressing the public health emergency of our time.

BEN DAVIS: What sort of images will be used? I mean, you just mentioned what is happening in WA; we all remember the ad with the- I think it was the oesophagus or something, some sort of internal organ getting the white stuff squeezed out of it as far as the smoker's concerned. I mean, that's something that's stuck in my head and that's been around for about 10 years. Is that what we're talking here? And where would these images be seen? I mean, are you going to put them on products, is it just part of an advertising campaign?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think we need to do a lot of things. I mean, one of the things we need to do is we need to improve the health literacy of the community; that actually goes back to teaching science better in schools. You know, if you understand the science better, you'll make more appropriate decisions about the food you eat, about vaccination, about hydration, about exercise.

We need sophisticated campaigns. We need to do better on food labelling, we need to make sure that's easily understood by people so that when they're planning the week's meals or they're planning that night's dinner or they're filling their child's lunchbox, they get some idea of what they're doing. And maybe we look at what did work in tobacco in terms of graphic images. The comparison ...

BEN DAVIS: [Interrupts] Are you suggesting putting graphic images on food products or beverages?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, we might need to look at that. The comparison with tobacco is not an unreasonable one. We're now talking about something which is overtaking tobacco as the cause. Tobacco's a lot easier, of course, because the way that 98, 99 per cent of Australians get their tobacco is in a packet of cigarettes; it's a lot easier. The foodstuffs that are contributing to the obesity epidemic do not universally cause obesity.

BEN DAVIS: Correct.

MICHAEL GANNON: If you pull out the chicken nuggets once every nine months, then there's less of a problem than if it's a daily choice.

BEN DAVIS: See, Doctor, I'd be uncomfortable if I picked up a can of Coke, the full strength stuff, the super, and there's a photo on there of someone who's lost a limb, someone's who's suffering as far as Type 2 diabetes is concerned.

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, that's right, and that's why ...

BEN DAVIS: [Interrupts] Is that what you're talking about, though?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, that's why this is more complex. That's why this is a bit harder than tobacco, that's why the approach needs to be more nuanced. You know, we need to look at the sport and recreation activities and access to people, we need to look at the food labelling in terms of accurate information, not just the shock tactics, we need to look at what we teach in schools; we need to do all of those things.

BEN DAVIS: Are you alright, Doctor? Do you need to go, do you?

MICHAEL GANNON: I'm off to deliver a baby, but it's been great talking to you.

BEN DAVIS: Really? Doctor, you need to go. Righto, bringing new life into the world as we're trying to save them as well. I will let you go, Doctor, thank you.

Dr Michael Gannon, the President of the AMA.

I'm sorry we had to cut that short, a few more questions to him, but I totally understand – nature will not wait.

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