Dear colleagues at Flinn Scientific Inc.,

We recently came across your safety poster featuring a blind woman named Carol (http://www.flinnsci.com/store/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=16224) Some of our colleagues have the poster hanging in their labs on campus. The text on the poster reads "Carol never wore her safety goggles, now she doesn't need them."

As educators we share with you a concern for safety in the lab and appreciate your work to educate students about the ways that goggles protect their vision from a variety of potential chemical hazards. What you might not realize however is that this poster sends a number of other unintended messages as well, messages that encourage a number of inaccuracies about the visually impaired.

So, for example, the poster suggests, falsely, that once you're blind you no longer need to protect your eyes from chemical hazards, and/or once you're blind you can't work in a lab anymore. On a more subtle level, the poster feeds into a notion that being blind is a personal tragedy of epic proportions, a tragedy that is inconsistent with a life goal of being a scientist. For folks who are sighted, an accident resulting in blindness certainly has this fear associated with it, and it is a situation we want sighted folks to actively avoid (hence the need for safety posters in chemical labs!). At the same time, we don't want to feed into the idea that the blind have lives not worth living. It turns out that blind folks have as much of a chance at a happy life as those of us who are sighted. Or more importantly, that most of the discomfort that comes with being blind is a result of uninformed reactions by the sighted, like the (unintended) reactions encouraged by this poster.

We hope these points help encourage you to reconsider the
distribution of this poster and/or to redesign the poster. Perhaps the poster could instead highlight the numbers of people who have become blind as a result of not wearing their goggles? Or given that Carol seems to be a popular character, that the poster could feature Carol, in a lab coat, as an active subject of the poster, reminding folks that safety goggles are important, rather than featuring her as a sad, passive object lesson to be pitied?

We hope these ideas make sense – do not hesitate to drop us a line if you have any questions! Looking forward to seeing what you come up with.

In solidarity,

Sharyn Clough, PhD
Stephanie Jenkins, PhD
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Disability Access Services

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From: David Larson [mailto:dlarson@flinns-ci.com]
Sent: Friday, June 28, 2013 2:25 PM
To: Gossett, Jennifer
Subject: FW: Safety Poster featuring Carol

Jennifer, Stephanie, and Sharyn,

Thank you for your shared concern regarding the Carol poster. Your comments were very well stated and will definitely be taken under serious consideration! The purpose of the poster was to remind students of the importance of wearing goggles whenever working with
chemicals, heat or glassware in the lab. Wearing safety eyewear that is appropriate for the hazards is a key requirement of federal and state Right to Know Laws, and the poster help teachers reinforce on a daily basis the importance of this laboratory safety requirement. Although the poster has drawn some criticism for its stark imagery, the importance of this message cannot be overstated. Teachers face enormous challenges every day in enforcing the most basic rule of laboratory science. The image is stark because of the possible consequences of not wearing goggles are stark.

Flinn Scientific regrets any interpretation of the poster’s message that might seek to denigrate blind or other disabled individuals. Respect for the dignity of each individual is at the core of all our relationships and we are committed to creating positive and supportive relationships both within the workplace and with all of our customers.

Thank you again for your email and for sharing your concerns!

Sincerely,

Dave Larson
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