

# JDPA

Journal of Dermatology *for* Physician Assistants

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SDPA NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

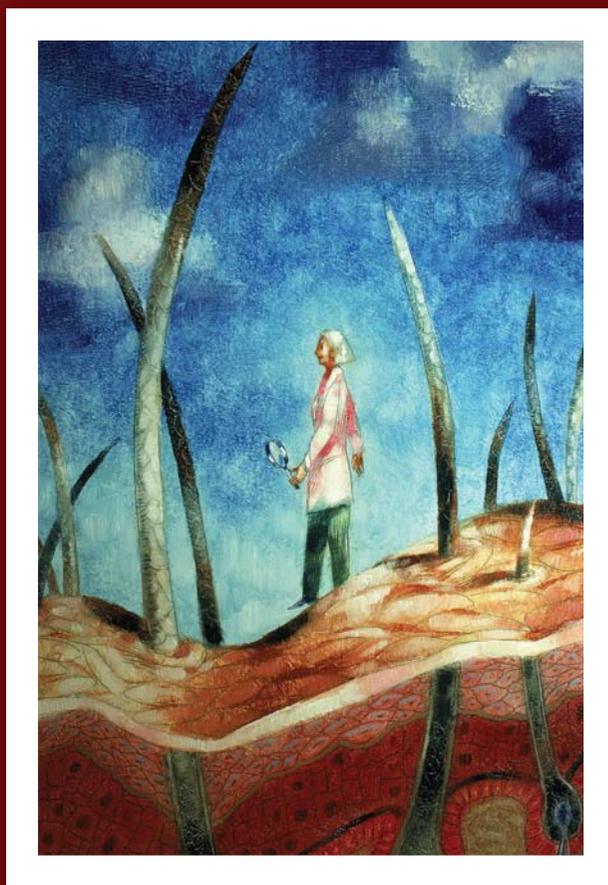
DERMATOLOGY PA NEWS AND NOTES

CLINICAL DERMATOLOGY

SURGICAL DERMATOLOGY

COSMETIC DERMATOLOGY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



**SUPPLEMENT**  
for the International  
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Official Journal of the Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants

# JDPA

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Society of Dermatology  
Physician Assistants, Inc  
P.O. Box 701461  
San Antonio, Texas 78270  
1-800-380-3992  
SDPA@dermpa.org  
www.dermpa.org

### **PUBLISHING STAFF**

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**Managing Editor** Jennifer M. Hayden, M.Ed  
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### **SALES OFFICE**

Physician Assistant Communications, LLC  
P.O. Box 416, Manlius NY 13104-0416  
Phone (315) 663-4147  
PAC@paccommunications.org  
www.paccommunications.org

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## FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

### *I am not just a sweaty person*

By Michelle Vicari

I remember my first experience with excessive underarm sweating like it was yesterday; I was seventeen years old and trying to impress my crush. He worked at the local mall so I decided to take a trip there to shop and of course, check him out. I got ready and put on what I thought was my best shirt, a green silk top. I thought I looked my best and was feeling confident. I walked by his store several times, trying to catch his eye. Waiting to be noticed, I began sweating more than usual. I looked down at my shirt to find two very obvious sweat stains under my armpits. I panicked with embarrassment!

This experience, which was seemingly minor but devastating for a teenage girl, was the first of many similar ones that occurred over the next fifteen years in both social and professional settings. About five years ago, I realized that I had been suffering from an actual medical condition; I wasn't just a "sweaty person." I began researching my symptoms on the Internet and found that I should seek medical advice. The first two dermatologists I saw were not very helpful. They told me that my sweating was caused by anxiety and tried to put me on various anti-anxiety medications, and suggested I "learn to calm down." I felt the notion that I had a physical condition – as opposed to an emotional one – was disregarded.

My primary care provider let me try prescription antiperspirants, but admitted this was not his area of expertise and

referred me to my first dermatologist, whose specialty was supposedly hyperhidrosis. The dermatologist provided an informational pamphlet on hyperhidrosis, but he spent more time looking at suspect freckles than discussing solutions to my condition. I asked to see a different physician. The second dermatologist I visited was more helpful, but only suggested other types of procedures

that his office provided. After mentioning that I had heard botulinum toxin injections were proven to be helpful in treating this condition, he gave me more information on the treatment but did not offer to help me, suggesting I was exaggerating my symptoms. I began to feel that improving my condition was not as important to these doctors as it was to me.

Soon after these discouraging consultations, I met with dermatologists who were true hyperhidrosis experts and knew about a variety of treatments, including botulinum toxin injections. The opportunity to be able to speak with dermatologists who had first hand knowledge about hyperhidrosis and available treatments was refreshing. Additionally, to have doctors who understood the effect the condition had on me (as well as others) was amazing. It gave me a sense of hope to finally feel that someone understood my problem and was willing to help.

I had tried so many different remedies over the years that were unsuccessful; I did not expect much when I was finally treated

*"It gave me a sense of hope to finally feel that someone understood my problem and was willing to help."*

## FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

with botulinum toxin. To my surprise, within a few days I noticed a significant decrease in my sweating. I was ecstatic about the results. Events and situations that I had previously avoided, I was now looking forward to. I had this newfound confidence in myself that had been missing my entire adult life. I gained enough confidence to speak about my condition and not be embarrassed or ashamed. After finally finding a solution, I discovered many people I knew suffered from hyperhidrosis, mostly in silence. While I was lucky to have the perseverance to find a treatment that has dramatically improved my life, I know there are countless patients who may suffer unnecessarily with hyperhidrosis. I encourage health care providers to be understanding and to talk openly with their patients about symptoms and treatment options. In my case and so many others, it is only the healthcare professional who can help treat the condition and give patients hope. 🙌

*Michelle Vicari is thirty-two years old and has been suffering from hyperhidrosis since she was fifteen. She first sought medical treatment/consultation at the age of twenty-four. She is happy to report that her condition has been successfully managed with botulinum toxin injections for the past year.*

## TAKE HOME POINTS for DERM PAs:

*By Steven K. Shama, MD, MPH*

- It seems that both the first and second dermatologists felt that they both somehow "understood" what Michelle needed...an explanation and their own approach to the excess sweating. I have been taught by my teachers that after I have offered an explanation of what I believe the problem is, that I check in with the patient and say, "How does that sound? Does what I have said make sense to you? Is there anything else that I can say?" Whether it does or doesn't make sense, it is the patient who needs to embrace your thoughts. *Never be satisfied with your own explanation... it has to be relevant and meaningful to the patient.*
- I am sometimes guilty of telling patients only what I know and do in my office. In Michelle's story, it seems that her first two dermatologists only offered her approaches that they did, and never mentioned botulinum toxin injections (which is considered by some dermatologists to be a cosmetic procedure). Lesson learned: Tell patients the whole story, be complete in telling them what is available (even if it is something that you don't do) and be prepared to refer them to those dermatology offices that do provide that approach.

# JDPA

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The Official Journal of the SDPA

Are you a dermatology patient who may be...

- Interested in writing?
- Willing to share your skin's story, so that others may learn from it?

Contact Travis Hayden at: [Editor@jdpa.org](mailto:Editor@jdpa.org)



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