

# JDPA

Journal of Dermatology *for* Physician Assistants

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SDPA NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

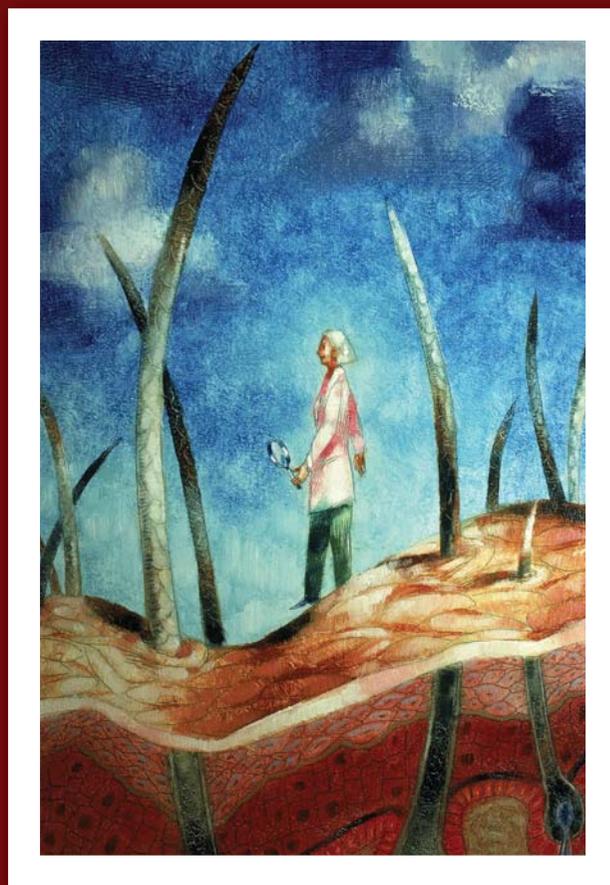
DERMATOLOGY PA NEWS AND NOTES

CLINICAL DERMATOLOGY

SURGICAL DERMATOLOGY

COSMETIC DERMATOLOGY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



SUPPLEMENT  
for  
Camp Discovery



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

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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

## *Away at camp, at home in her own skin*

By Cindy Davis

### Where there is discomfort, you can find joy

For Abigail, it took a leap of faith. Abigail Davis, a fun-loving 10-year-old and the youngest of my three daughters, has been struggling with chronic eczema for eight years. Eczema, or atopic dermatitis, is the flaring of dry, itchy skin with the appearance of a rash. This condition in its milder form is most commonly present in the warmer areas of the body, such as behind the knees and at the bend of the arm. However, Abigail battles with eczema from head to toe, with the exception of her face. Therefore, she has the sensation to itch just about everywhere 24/7.

Just like any long-term disease, the itchy skin is not the only obstacle she faces. With this condition, she faces countless doctor appointments, the daily regimen of taking medications, applying topical ointments, moisturizing her skin throughout the day, questions and comments (some not so



nice) from children and adults, stares (if she allows herself to wear something other than a sweatshirt and long pants), sleepless nights, difficulty focusing, trying to be upbeat with your friends when feeling miserable and as if no one understands.

In the spring, as summer activity opportunities started coming home from school and in the mail, I asked Abigail if she would like to ask a friend to go with her to one of the summer camps in this area. Her response was, "No. Not with all that I have to do to my skin. I would be embarrassed."

In an attempt to provide her with the same opportunities that her sisters had with summer camps, I asked her if she would consider a camp for children with skin disorders if we could find one. She enthusiastically said, "Yes. I would go in a heartbeat!" I told her that it would mean going to camp without a friend and she responded, "I don't care. I just want to go somewhere I can just be normal, and where everyone would understand me."



Abigail and I began researching summer camps online and found a camp for children with skin disorders, Camp Discovery at Camp Knutson, in Cross Lake, Minn., which is sponsored by the American Academy of Dermatology. I called Abigail's dermatologist's office, Dermatology Associates of West Michigan, and asked a nurse if she would check with Dr. Richard Ashack to see if he thought Abigail would be a candidate for Camp Discovery. When the nurse called back, she told me that not only would Dr. Ashack write Abigail a letter of recommendation, he would personally fill out her application.

Abigail, who was brave enough to fly out-of-state and go to camp, recently returned home from what

### TAKE HOME POINTS for DERM PAs:

By Steven K. Shama, MPH, MD

- Abigail wanted to know that someone understood what it was like to live in her skin. Be that clinician who does his/her best to truly empathize.
- Abigail wanted to go somewhere where "I can be just normal." Treat your patients not like they are broken but like they just need some minor adjustments.
- Be on the lookout for patients who need something extra. Simply listen to what isn't being said during your interaction with them. Perhaps your office can supply that truly needed word of support and caring. Perhaps you can refer them to a support group if one exists or encourage them to create one. Have faith that support groups can really make a difference in supplementing your care.

I spent a weekend at Camp Discovery thirteen years ago and a full week the following year. It changed my life as a clinician. I left with tears in my eyes, realizing that I had gotten so much more from the experience than I believed I ever actually gave a child. I believe that the children are angels teaching us a lesson about understanding, acceptance, and caring.

## FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE



she says was the best thing she has ever experienced.

### Mom worries; daughter plays

While I was at home, second-guessing myself the week she was gone, Abigail was having the time of her life embracing friendships with kids her age that

face the same challenges she does. When I asked Abigail if they talked about their issues, she said, "Mom, this wasn't about our skin. This was about going to camp with kids like me, doing everything people do at summer camps and when someone couldn't do something, everyone understood."

On the ride home from the airport, with Abigail talking a bazillion miles per hour, I squeezed my husband's hand, with my eyes closed and tears running down my face. I silently prayed "Thank you, Jesus!" Abigail found her home away from home and comfort, for the first time in a very long time - in her own skin. And we are forever grateful.

Our next goal is to start a local support group for children with skin disorders, so Abigail doesn't have to wait another year to get together with friends who share similar challenges.

## DISABILITY OR BLESSING?

So, then I need to ask myself, is Abigail's skin a disability? Or is it a blessing that, through the aches and pains, she has developed perseverance, empathy, knowledge, strength, and the ability to find (at an airport) a Starbucks to buy a Frappuccino as she awaits a return flight home? There is a whole world out there. Sometimes just taking the first step to find your "normal" is the hardest step. It was a leap of faith for us, but the jump was well worth the landing.

There are camps for autism, Down Syndrome, asthma, diabetes, and countless other conditions. Opportunities are out there. Go ahead and take the leap. Do not live as though no one understands, because someone out there does. 🙋

*Cindy Davis lives in Jenison, Michigan with her husband, Greg, and their three daughters, Meghan, 15, Emily, 13, and Abigail, 10. Cindy was so moved by her daughter's experience at Camp Discovery that she felt compelled to share her thoughts. "This was written completely out of passion," she said.*

*Impressed by Abigail's camp experience, Davis is eager to form a local support group for people with skin disorders. She is particularly impressed by the example set by the camp counselors, who all have skin disorders. "What I want Abby to learn is you can wallow in self-pity or you can try to make a difference for somebody," she said. Once a child has been accepted to Camp Discovery, they can go back to camp every year. This is an extraordinary opportunity, which gives children something to look forward to each year, especially when daily living may be so hard.*

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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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American Academy of Dermatology's

# CAMP DISCOVERY

**Fun and friendship are on the top of everyone's agenda. And, everyone shares in the discovery of what it's like to be included. Camp Discovery is a wonderful experience for the campers who attend and for those that volunteer.**

Founded by the American Academy of Dermatology, Camp Discovery is for young people with chronic skin conditions and offers a summer camping experience unlike any they've ever had.

Under the expert care of dermatologists, nurses and physician assistants, Camp Discovery offers young people the opportunity to spend a week with other campers who have similar skin conditions. Many of the counselors have chronic skin conditions as well, and can provide support and advice to campers.

“Camp Discovery is an opportunity to volunteer and give back but also to learn how these kids cope every day with their skin condition. I have a much better appreciation for the amount of work parents put in just to get their child to put on something as simple as a moisturizer. I also realized how much the kids look forward to this one week a year where they are just like everyone else.”

“Camp Discovery was a life changing experience for me. I loved everything about camp, and having the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with kids and counselors with skin disorders I had only previously read about in textbooks was a unique opportunity. They taught me more about disease than I could ever learn from a book.”

“What makes this unique is how special these kids are – especially what they teach us about strength and living through adversity. For a lot of these kids, pain is a part of their life.”



For information about volunteering at one of the camps or referring a child to Camp Discovery, visit [campdiscovery.org](http://campdiscovery.org) or contact Janine Mueller at (847) 240-1737 or [jmueller@aad.org](mailto:jmueller@aad.org).

