

Frost Valley YMCA Marks 30th Year Mainstreaming Dialysis Summer Campers

For 60 Young Kidney Patients "Regular" Summer Camp Is Not Just A Dream

This summer 60 kids ages 8-15 who require kidney dialysis will join their peers in regular summer camp activities because the medical equipment they need will be in place. Bringing together the medical staff, therapeutic technologies and a patron to provide the funding, Frost Valley YMCA became the nation's first camp to invite children on dialysis into their summer camp population 30 years ago.

Since 1975 over 1,000 kids have benefited from this unique program. Throughout the eight weeks of summer children on dialysis attend any one of four sessions on 6,000 acres in the heart of the Catskill forest preserve, thanks to the Ruth Carole Gottscho Kidney Foundation of Short Hills, New Jersey.

"For two weeks our dialysis campers feel just like every other child going to camp," said Jerry Huncosky, Frost Valley CEO. "That's what makes this camp so different," Huncosky continued, "campers on dialysis go to all the same activities like hiking, climbing, campfires, horseback riding, as their cabin mates, and they learn all about kidneys, de-mystifying the ailment and the treatment."

Children with kidney disease may have trouble fitting in, according to the National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse, a service of the National Institute of Health. The Clearinghouse website data suggests integrating young kidney patients into mainstream activities stating, "Parents may feel protective of a sick child, but should not try to limit activity unless instructed by a doctor."

"I was a shy girl before my first camp experience but I really came out of my shell," said Amanda Harrowfield, a former dialysis camper. Ms. Harrowfield returned summer after summer and eventually became a counselor helping other dialysis campers. She later joined the Frost Valley staff, where she met her husband. "I can't imagine what my life would have been like without my camp experience," Amanda said.

At 12 years old, it was Marlon Haley first time away from home -- on his own -- as a dialysis camper last summer at Frost Valley. His mother, Maryann Haley, said, "It was hard for me to let go but he really grew from the experience and became more independent. He seemed to have matured during those two weeks."

Marlon's doctor, Lewis Reisman, MD, had suggested Frost Valley summer camp to Mrs. Haley. Dr. Reisman had volunteered at the Dialysis Camp and knew that Marlon would be fine with the doctors and nurses there. And Marlon loved it. He loved the food, the counselors, the activities, his cabin mates. "He is already signed up to return to Frost Valley this July," Mrs. Haley said.

Each summer part of the health center is transformed into a satellite operation of the Nephrology Department of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore, directed by Frederick J. Kaskel, MD, PhD, and Professor of Pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, NYC. It contains full-service hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis units. The experienced pediatric nephrologists and nephrology nurses arrange treatment schedules to minimize time away from camp activities.

An analysis of 291 juvenile kidney patients by a team of doctors¹ affiliated with the University of Florida's College of Medicine at Gainesville, found that the mortality rate for children on chronic dialysis is almost 80 times higher than normal. Quality of life for pediatric kidney patients is the primary focus for all those associated with this effort.

The Dialysis Camp program requires additional camp counselors, but for Huncosky, making a summer camp experience available for children on dialysis is worth the additional expense. Eva Gottscho, whose Ruth Carole Gottscho Kidney Foundation is named for her daughter who had kidney failure, has made this thirty-year long commitment possible by funding the additional medical staff and equipment. Eva has underwritten the fees for more than 1,000 children to come to summer camp over the last 30 years. She addressed the Frost Valley annual meeting on May 18 at Highlawn Pavilion in West Orange, NJ.

Frost Valley YMCA is a year-round camping and conference facility serving 35,000 people annually with family weekend programs, environmental education for students, summer camp options, and sports memberships. For 104 years Frost Valley's focus on spirit, mind, and body has promoted positive character traits, outdoor activity, and the value of nature. Call 845-985-2291 for program information or go to www.FrostValley.org.

¹ Richard Neiberger, MD, PhD; Marcella Schwalbe, MD; Deogracias Pena, MD; Robert Fennell, MD; Susan F. Massengill, MD; Alan Cantor, PhD; William Donnelly, MD; George Richard, MD