CHANGING CHILDREN’S LIVES ONE SUMMER AT A TIME FOR 20 YEARS

American Academy of Dermatology’s Camp Discovery provides life changing experiences for children with chronic skin conditions

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. (June 20, 2013) – Summer camp is a rite of passage for many children. However, for children and teens with chronic skin conditions—conditions that make everyday life challenging, such as getting dressed, participating in social activities, fitting in with their peers—summer camp used to be out of reach. The American Academy of Dermatology’s (Academy) Camp Discovery changed all that.

For the past 20 summers, Camp Discovery has been making a difference in the lives of these children—some of whom require extensive, daily medical treatment and supervision. By offering on-site medical care, children and teens can experience a typical summer camp, where everyone leaves with new, lifelong friends, a burst of self-confidence and the knowledge that serious skin conditions do not need to be a hindrance to learning how to horseback ride, paddle a canoe or perform in a talent show!

The Campers: Expectation and Determination

For the last three years, Henry DeAngelis has attended Camp Discovery in the hopes of making another bullseye at the archery range. Henry, age 12, has epidermolysis bullosa (EB), a severe skin condition that makes his skin extremely fragile and prone to painful blisters and open sores. Henry’s skin is covered by bandages that are changed every other day, he can’t stand for long periods of time and has trouble eating and swallowing. Yet to him, Camp Discovery is a place for trying new things rather than just watching.

“Being at Camp Discovery makes me feel normal, like I fit in and I can do anything I want to,” said Henry, a third-grader from Des Moines, Iowa. “I tried archery, even though my hands are bandaged, I rode a horse—which was awesome—and I even got to go to a dance. Camp gives me opportunities to do things that I might not have been able to try on my own.”

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The Medical Volunteers: Learning and Giving

Since its inception in 1993, Camp Discovery also has been making a difference in the lives of the medical personnel who volunteer their time and expertise to help these children and teens enjoy a week of camp.

“Dermatologists have said time and again that their experience at Camp Discovery has changed the way they treat children and even adults with serious skin conditions in their practices,” said board-certified dermatologist Dirk M. Elston, MD, FAAD, president of the Academy. “Volunteers at camp often see rare skin conditions that they wouldn’t normally see in their offices. They also grasp how daily management of a skin condition really affects a child’s life. As a result of the care they provide to children at Camp Discovery, they have been able to adjust treatment they provide in their offices to make daily living less challenging for patients with chronic skin diseases and their families.”

In addition, medical volunteers see first-hand how serious skin conditions can affect a child or teen’s self-confidence.

“Children and teens with visible skin conditions, such as epidermolysis bullosa, psoriasis, alopecia areata, or vitiligo, may feel isolated from their peers because they are self-conscious, have been teased or cannot participate in regular activities due to the limitations of their skin condition,” said Camp Discovery founder, board-certified dermatologist Mark Dahl, MD, FAAD. “Camp Discovery is a place where all the campers have a skin condition, so there’s no need to be embarrassed or self-conscious. We encourage the kids to wear shorts, jump in the lake and get dirty – the things that most kids do at camp – because no one is judging each other here. Everyone just wants to have fun.”

The Counselors: Guidance and Support

Many of the Camp Discovery counselors are former campers themselves which gives them a unique opportunity to support and advise younger campers.

Allyson Taubenheim started attending Camp Discovery when she was 10. Diagnosed with vitiligo, a skin disease where large patches of skin begin to lose their color, when she was six-months-old, Allyson found Camp Discovery to be a place where no one stared at her skin or said anything hurtful about its discoloration.

“Camp Discovery was where I really learned to start loving myself and my skin,” said Allyson, 24, who lives in Minneapolis. “After my last summer as a camper, I knew I could be a -more-
great role model for kids with skin disease. I can relate to their struggles and hurdles, and I can offer advice, support and wisdom. I want to give back to Camp Discovery for all it’s given to me.”

The 20th Anniversary: Accomplishments to Celebrate

At the beginning, Camp Discovery was a single location hosting 47 children for one week. It has now grown into a six-camp program in five different states, serving young people from all over the world. In 2012, more than 250 medical staff and volunteers helped 330 campers have positive, life-changing, summer camp experiences. And, as always, children attend camp at no cost to their families, thanks to the Academy, its members and other supporters.

“Since its inception, Camp Discovery has made a significant impact in the lives of the children and teens who look forward to returning every year, as well as in the lives of the counselors and medical staff,” said Dr. Elston. “While Camp Discovery touches so many lives in so many different ways, what’s most important is that at Camp Discovery no one is defined by their appearance or the needs of their condition. Everyone just has fun.”

To learn more about Camp Discovery, see photos and read highlights over the past 20 years, visit [www.campdiscovery.org](http://www.campdiscovery.org).

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Celebrating 75 years of advocating for dermatologic research and quality patient care.
The American Academy of Dermatology (Academy), founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. A sister organization to the Academy, the American Academy of Dermatology Association is the resource for government affairs, health policy and practice information for dermatologists, and plays a major role in formulating policies that can enhance the quality of dermatologic care. With a membership of more than 17,000 physicians worldwide, the Academy is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical, and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin. For more information, contact the Academy at 1-888-462-DERM (3376) or [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org). Follow the Academy on Facebook (American Academy of Dermatology) or Twitter (@AADskin).