News from City of Hope’s Childhood Cancer Survivorship Program

Benefits of the Oncology Camp Experience
by Karla Wilson, R.N., M.S.N., F.N.P-C

Summer camp has been a common activity for children for decades and the childhood adventures at summer camp provide lifelong memories for many adults. However, most camps are not prepared to provide for children who have any type of chronic illness — so until the late 1970s children with cancer lost out on participating in this traditional summer activity.

Oncology Camp Isn’t Just for Kids Anymore
Traditionally we think of oncology camp as an activity for a child, but over the last several years it has become evident that the “camp” experience provides an opportunity for people of all ages and cancer experiences. The outgrowth from this is that there are now numerous camp programs that are geared for people of all ages. For many, regardless of age or diagnosis and whether they are in the midst of therapy or an off-therapy survivor, attending these camps can enhance the cancer experience by helping them connect with others in a similar situation.

Child with Cancer
Oncology camps for children started as an opportunity to make children with cancer “feel more normal” and allow them to participate in common recreational activities such as swimming and hiking. Camps also provide a safe environment to increase their independence and learn coping skills necessary to face the many issues brought on as a result of their diagnosis and treatment process.

Siblings
Siblings often have feelings of being abandoned or isolated when their brother or sister has been diagnosed with cancer. This may lead to being jealous of the attention the child with cancer receives and then feeling guilty. More and more camps now include sibling programs, allowing the siblings to connect and participate in fun activities together. In addition, just like their sibling with cancer, the well sibling is learning they aren’t alone as they have their feelings validated and learn coping skills from other siblings.

Parents
For parents, having their child go off to camp can be a scary experience — as this is often the first time that their child is going somewhere without them since the cancer diagnosis — even if it has been several years since they completed therapy. Parents can take comfort in knowing that camps are well-staffed with pediatric oncology doctors and nurses along with trained counselors and other staff. The time that the child is away can provide a period of respite for the parent and present them with an opportunity to bond with the children who are not attending the camp.

Family Camps
Oncology camps have been so successful for younger children with cancer that there are now numerous camps that, in addition to sibling programs, have weekend family camps that the whole family can attend together. There are generally a variety of activities, and educational and support programs for each member of the family that caters to their specific needs.
Benefits of the oncology camp experience for campers include:

- Reducing fear and anxiety by providing opportunities where they can interact with others, participate in “normal” activities and learn coping skills
- Understanding body image changes and how they perceive themselves
- Increasing knowledge about their disease and treatment
- Building peer socialization skills and confidence
- Learning they are not alone
- Enhancing self-esteem

Camp and Resources for Cancer Patients and Survivors

American Cancer Society: http://www.cancer.org/search/index?query=summer+camps
Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times (www.campronaldmcdonald.org): Camps for Kids, Teens, and Young Adults. The camp offers a wide range of activities, including sports, arts, and crafts.
Children’s Oncology Camps of America: http://www.cocai.org/
Dream Street Foundation Camps: www.dreamstreetfoundation.org
We Can Pediatric Brain Tumor Network: http://wcancancer.org/We_Can/Family_Camp.html
The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp: www.holinthewallgang.org
Camp Country Jamboree: www.campcountryjamboree.org

College Resources for Cancer Patients and Survivors

We Can Pediatric Brain Tumor Network: http://wecan.cc/We_can/family_camp.html
Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times (www.campronaldmcdonald.org) in Southern California, in addition to the traditional summer camp for patients and siblings, has several family camp weekends for both English and Spanish-speaking families. They also are the location of the We Can Pediatric Brain Tumor Network weekend camps, with programs for all family members, including special activities for teens, young adult patients and survivors.
Camp-Mak-A-Dream in Montana (www.campdream.org) is an example of a camp that has a medically supervised camp experience for children, young adults and families affected by cancer. The programs are for those currently undergoing treatment or who are now survivors.
Camp-Mak-A-Dream is specifically geared to young adults who were diagnosed between the ages of 18 to 39. First Descents has programs for fighters — as they term those still in treatment, and survivors — those no longer receiving treatment (travel scholarships are available).
Camp Keepsake in Southern California (www.cancerhopefoundation.org) offers an annual weekend retreat both for adults presently undergoing cancer treatment and cancer survivors who are now adults. Family members or caregivers are encouraged to attend. The camp is free, but attendance is based upon completed applications and review by the selection committee.
The camp experience, either as a cancer survivor or a volunteer staff member. More information can be found by searching “oncology camps” and “cancer survivor camps” on the Internet.

SAVE THE DATE: Tuesday, April 16, 6 to 8 p.m.

Date: April 16, 2013
Topic: Childhood Cancer Survivors: Taking Charge of Your Health
Location: City of Hope Cooper Auditorium
Time: 6 to 8 PM
Contact: 800-535-1390, ext. 65669
Watch for a flyer in your mailbox.

General Resources for Childhood Cancer Survivors

I'm Too Young For This! www.i2y.org
The SAMFund www.thesamfund.org
Cancer Survivors Network cson.cancer.org
The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults www.ulmanfund.org
LIVESTRONG www.livestrong.org

Fun at Camp Word Search

S W I M M I N G
N T S Q
G 4 W Y E F F W P Z
N L E I P S D I C B O W
I R X T E C A Q R J
G N I L L E T Y R O T S
N K G N I B M I L C S Z
I T I H I N G G Z R U O
S I X Z U J Z M Q D A R
F R E N D S H I P S
F R E N D S H I P S
S E R I E F M A C Q B P

Camp also had its price. Some campers never returned, including my first boyfriend, who succumbed to his illness.
In the summer of 1985, I met Sue. We were total opposites but we bonded immediately. She was ‘greener’ than I was, but I thank God for the camp, but as it was as if we’d never been apart, as if we were 15 again. We are truly each other’s ‘Other 1/2.’

Many dear friends from camp attended my party, some that I hadn’t seen since those wonderful days of our youth. I know Joy was there in spirit. I don’t know what my life would have been like if there hadn’t been a Camp Good Times, but I thank God for the camp and all the blessings it produced.

Camp helped me to start eighth grade with new confidence. I felt a little more at ease with my peers, and began taking an interest in fashion and my appearance. I tried out for cheerleading and the girl’s basketball team. Boys started to notice me.

Throughout the years, Joy and Sue remained my best friends, my D.D.S. and my Other 1/2. Though they never met and there were miles between us, we were always there for each other. Joy was the maid of honor at my wedding, and she swore she’d get back for making her wear that hot pink dress. I wish she had that opportunity, but she passed away in 2010 from long-term complications of her treatment.

At her request, I played my guitar and sang “Dust in the Wind” by Kansas at her memorial.

In May 2012, I had a big party to celebrate the 20th anniversary of my bone marrow transplant at City of Hope. Sue, now married with five children, flew out from Texas to share in my celebration. We’d only seen each other a few times since our days at camp, but as it was as if we’d never been apart, as if we were 15 again. We are truly each other’s ‘Other 1/2.’

Survivorship Connection