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Ostomy Nurses and Patients Team Up as "Georgia Peanuts"

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Children's was well represented at the 2007 YRC Youth Rally. Nine former Children's patients, a nurse and a nursing coordinator made up the "Georgia Peanuts" and traveled together to the nationwide camp sponsored by the Youth Rally Committee, Inc (YRC). The camp caters to children ages 11 to 17 who have or may need a bowel and/or a bladder diversion. Youth Rally provides a non-threatening environment where children receive education and psycho-social support that encourages independent living. This year's camp was held at the University of Colorado in Boulder, CO.

Marie Sosebee, Wound Ostomy & Continence Nurse (WOC Nurse) Coordinator, has been a YRC WOC nurse counselor for three years. Through e-mails, phone calls and letters, Sosebee recruited nine Georgia campers and a Children's at Egleston CICU nurse to attend this year's camp and even secured sponsorships from organizations, including Byram, Hollister, SER WOCN, and unknown Youth Rally donations to sponsor the campers and help offset costs associated with traveling and attending the YRC Youth Rally. 'Georgia Peanut' logo t-shirts were designed and donated by a local t-shirt company. Children's supported Sosebee's involvement through the Camp Assistance program that compensates employees for volunteering at camps that are aligned with our mission.

Staffers at the camp range from WOC nurses to adult counselors with similar experiences and psychology counselors. Sosebee first became a WOC Nurse counselor in 2005.

"I originally heard about the Youth Rally through the United Ostomy Association," said Sosebee. "I wanted to network with other pediatric WOC nurse professionals, and I wanted to become involved in a community-based support program that I could offer to my own ostomy patients."

Sosebee served as Medical Education Session Coordinator this year and educated campers on common medical conditions including hygiene, self-care practices, growth and development, and self-esteem using fun and innovative techniques. Sosebee's session was based on the popular television program, *America's Next Top Model*, and included "modeling" and "judging" of ostomy and continence products and accessories, commercial trivia, and hygiene and self-care skits. Campers and counselors alike participated as the model contestants, judges, actors, and actresses.

In addition to Sosebee's sessions, campers had the opportunity to participate in a variety of fun activities, including sports like swimming, softball, volleyball and skating. They also participated in outdoor activities such as picnics, crafts, sightseeing and hiking. Further educational and networking sessions included formal and informal discussion and peer support groups. The camp experience ended with a farewell dance and graduation party.

"Every year at camp, we go to an amusement park. This year, I was able to convince two 12-year-old campers with ostomies to ride a roller coaster for the first time. The delight on their faces and listening to their screams was simply fantastic," said Sosebee.

Through her involvement with the camp, Sosebee is able to experience a 'real world' view of how healthy kids with ostomies truly do live. This knowledge and experience helps her counsel new post-op ostomy patients and explain that they are not alone and yes, they can live a normal life.

"At Children's, I work in an acute care setting where I routinely provide pre-op and post-op counseling and education for children and teens undergoing ostomy procedures. When I take care of them, they are sick. I don't get to see them in a normal environment living like healthy kids," she said. "Being able to watch them interact with other kids and enjoy normal activities is rewarding for me on a personal and professional level."

The experience was equally rewarding for our patients and their parents. They expressed their gratitude to Sosebee for not only organizing the trip, but also making sure the Peanuts made the most of their experience. In fact, Sosebee receiving the following thank-you note from one camper once they came back home:

"Thank you for helping me participate in the trip. It was a nice experience for me. I had fun. I met people with similar problems. I also found new stuff to use on my ostomy, and also found out that I can play around with it."

"This experience continually keeps me passionate about my role with pediatric ostomy patients, and it helps me relate to the kids on a very personal basis," said Sosebee. "I strongly encourage Children's employees with gastrointestinal or genitourinary medical conditions to volunteer for the Youth Rally as counselors, and, of course, we are always looking for help in recruiting more 'Georgia Peanuts' for next year's camp".

