

Camp Enhances Summer Fun for Diabetic Children

By Larisa Skiba

During summer camp last June, 19 children kayaked on the Volga River, hiked through the woods outside Dubna, Russia, and bicycled over back roads. They sang around the campfire, played volleyball and proved that even though they had diabetes, they could have just as much fun as any other children.

The three-week camp was a collaborative effort among financial sponsor Eli Lilly and Co.; the Moscow Diabetes School, which provided medical services; and the Dubna Diabetics Association, which organized camp activities. Because of the success of the camp, Lilly is considering sponsoring a similar camp this summer.

We wanted to engage and entertain the children and show them that diabetics can lead interesting and full lives. By immersing the children in sports and other activities, we wanted to help children and their parents overcome the fear of living a normal life. I and two other adult diabetics answered the children's questions about diabetes, taught sports and organized entertainment.

At camp, the children went through all the necessary treatment and gained new knowledge about how to manage and live with their disease through lectures and demonstration sessions. Lilly contributed glucometers and a set of strips for each child so that they could check their blood sugar levels. Four physicians and two nurses from the Moscow Diabetes School helped educate the children and monitored their condition.

The camp, at the Dubna Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, included children from ages 9 to 15 from several towns in Moscow Oblast, a couple hours away from Dubna. The strain of living with the disease made some of the children reserved and unsociable--especially two little boys from the town of Klin. But after the experience of living with other children with diabetes, the boys turned into real little devils! It was like a miracle.

We studied, swam and sun tanned at the beach. We saw horses at a farm and watched large ships and barges go through the locks from the Moscow Sea to the Volga River. During the camp's fireman day, we rode fire trucks and had a variety of water activities at our Neptune day celebration. We enjoyed spending the evenings on the banks of the Dubna River gazing into a camp fire and raising the flag with our camp's symbol to greet the rising sun in the morning. The children expressed their thoughts, wishes and even poetry in the daily paper we produced.

All too soon the 20-day camp ended. The tears in the children's eyes at their departure from camp were the best gift of appreciation for us.

Larisa Skiba is president of the Dubna Diabetics Association.