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Pediatric Transplant: Quality of Life

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Problem/Purpose: Children with end stage organ failure require extensive disease management and education to enhance allograft function, increase longevity of the allograft, and improve quality of life. Camp is a fun approach to provide needed education and support as well as a time to "be normal" with other children like them.

Approach: The Bridges Foundation provides 3 summer camps for children who have had solid organ transplants. Teen camp is for children 12-18. Family camp is for all age recipients and immediate family. Young adult camp is for 19 years and over and focuses on transition from the pediatric world to adulthood. Camp incorporates fun activities, education, relationship building, and fitness to promote healthy living. The focus is on building self esteem and confidence within the pediatric transplant population. Staff includes nephrologists, surgeons, nurses, child life specialists, counselors, nutritionists, along with a host of volunteers.

Results: Since 1994, our camps have grown from 5 campers to 200 plus. Many who attend camps develop life-long friendships. Children and families learn important self care regimens. Most importantly, they learn they are not alone. As campers feel accepted and empowered, quality of life improves and survival rates increase.

Conclusion: By offering the camp experience outside the hospital setting, we are able to enhance the quality of life in children who have received a solid organ transplant. It offers additional ways to assist in improving outcomes, minimize illness, encourage compliance, and become independent successful adults.

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