

Dr. Sam Wentworth leads the No Limits Camp in Indiana. In October 2008, Sam shared the stage with Balance & Stretch Center President Rick Miller where both presented at the Diabetes Education & Camping Association (DECA) National Conference hosted at Camp Victory in Pennsylvania. Sam also authored the following article for a DECA newsletter.

## **Our Experience with Balance and Stretch®**

Dr. Sam Wentworth

As camps and health care providers who try to educate young people with diabetes, we are always searching for a means or a tool to get the concept of diabetes self care through the heads of our clients. No matter how we attack the problem of education, the material is about the same. How do we get young people, including teens in particular, to listen and apply even basic information and skills? What is relevant enough to be internalized for a life time? Most of us doing diabetes education at camps and other locations are not known primarily as educators with the result of many young people just plain “missing the boat.” The search for the best presentation continues for most of us.

When the concept of Balance and Stretch was first presented by Camp Joslin and Clara Barton Camp to those present at the 2006 DECA meeting, most came away with a wrong idea of what the basic idea was. Most thought it was a “program” rather than a simple organizing principle. In 2007, via Rick Miller and his sponsors generosity, many camps signed up for free materials to use at camp that summer. Again, it seems that many thought these were to be teaching materials or a “how to” manual rather than support for existing camp education.

At the DECA 2008 meeting I presented our experience with Balance & Stretch. Since our camp, No Limits Diabetes, deals only with teens, Balance and Stretch came as we were looking for ways to make our diabetes education relevant and thought provoking. That is, a way to have teens actually listen and think about managing their diabetes. We were interested in having a graphic that allowed teens to see how so many parts of both medical management and general life situations can affect their health and blood sugar. We presented the concept that one could start at any point in the star and see that it could affect all of the other points. Using that graphic, we then used the same basic information we had always used, just in the “star” format.

Our teens very quickly looked at the medical management star and felt that “sleep” (or lack of it in the case of most teens) was a stress and should be moved to that point as a subtopic. When asked what should be used to fill the point that was previously sleep, the teens felt it should be “faith.” It was point out that faith was on the life star. The teens quickly replied that the faith on the life star was faith in something outside of yourself while the faith that they felt should be in the medical star was faith in yourself. This very idea of the teens really says it all. Without faith in yourself, how can you do all of the things we ask of teens with diabetes. The interaction of the ten points of the stars provide clear graphic model that is so simple but so true. The graphics not only helped me

facilitate the discussion but it helped our campers and staff to RETAIN what we talked about.

Our experience was successful enough that I chose to bring the concept with me when I went to support a camp for kids with diabetes in Russia this summer. It worked well in Moscow too. And while the No Limits experience was focused on teens, I was not surprised that other camps reported success at the 2008 DECA meetings. Ken Luraask at Camp Hickory Hill wrote that Balance & Stretch was an effective tool in helping him with his campers ages 8-12. Alicia McAuliffe reported the same at the Circle of Life camp and Mark Moyer reported success using the Balance & Stretch concept with Setebaid's Family camp program.

Balance and Stretch is not a program or a series of manuals just to be distributed without explanation and even a challenge to best use the materials. If camps use the graphic to reinforce your current programs, hopefully, the basic information will stick with your campers and your staff.

**The bottom line: Use of the graphic is free to DECA members. It is working for us.**