

Medical Volunteers and Seasonal Staff Study Overview

Study aims and relevance

Medical specialty camps have long been considered settings for respite, growth, socialization, and other positive outcomes for children living with serious illnesses, but less is known about camps' potential to affect the well-being of the adult healthcare providers who care for them. Providing nurses and physicians with opportunities to build stress resilience and coping is a demonstrated need in the healthcare field, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address these needs, the aims of this study were to:

1. To evaluate the potential outcomes that volunteering or working seasonally at a SeriousFun camp can have for healthcare providers.
2. To evaluate the key elements of camp that influenced those outcomes.

Methods

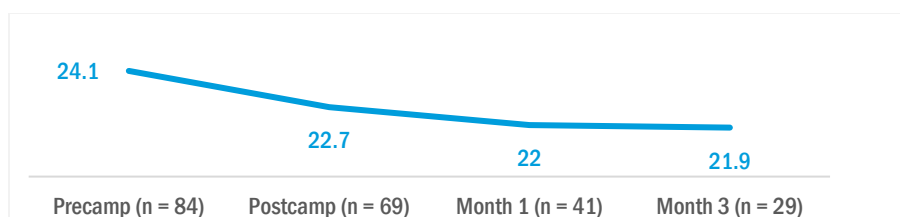
To conduct this study, SeriousFun Children's Network (SeriousFun) contracted with the University of Colorado-Denver to survey medical volunteers and seasonal staff at six U.S. Member Camps and conduct semi-structured interviews. Individual camps invited their 2022 summer medical volunteers and seasonal staff. Of the 107 volunteers interested, 89% ($n = 95$) completed at least one survey.

Study participants received a survey during the week before camp, and at 1-week, 1-month, and 3-months after camp. Measures included two psychometrically validated instruments (professional quality of life and wellbeing scales) and other workplace satisfaction and retention questions. Other closed- and open-ended questions after camp assessed the study participants' experience during camp and its perceived impact on their professional jobs. Semi-structured interviews were completed within the month after camp.

Results

Quantitative

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress scores** were statistically significantly lower after volunteering at camp and at three months after camp.



- Most camp volunteers reported **positive camp experiences**: 99% ($n = 75$) felt included and reported a sense of purpose. Personal (92%, $n = 78$) and professional connections (88%, $n = 75$) were forged and ~60% were still intact 3-months after camp.
- Volunteering at camp did not statistically change levels of compassion, satisfaction, and burnout. None of the wellbeing scales (burnout, emotional thriving, and emotionally ability to recover) showed statistical changes at any point after camp.

Qualitative

Interviews revealed that volunteering greatly impacted a provider's personal and professional **perspective**. Interviewees reported finding **respite, value, sense of purpose**, and a **"joy in medicine."** Furthermore, the different view they gained of their pediatric patients led them to appreciate the positive impact they have on patients' lives.

Participants reported reflecting on their daily work while at camp. Camp was seen as an ideal place for teamwork, positive attitudes, practicing medicine without frustration, and having meaning and value. Camp was also an opportunity to take a step back to reset and rejuvenate, serve as a reminder for what participants loved (and didn't love) about their daily work, and gain new perspectives about patients.

Theme	Example Quote
Perspective	"It was important for my mental health to be surrounded by others in the healthcare field that care so passionately about their patients and work together in a team approach. I do not have that in my current workplace and it was a nice reminder."
Respite	"Volunteering at camp was a reset for me. It served as a 'cup filler' and I'm excited to return!"
Value	"Volunteering at camp reminds me of why went into medicine. Every once in a while, I would see a camper I took care of in the hospital. To see that child now running around and having fun is incredibly rewarding and a great reminder of the importance of the work I do."
Sense of purpose	"Seeing patients thrive in this non-medical setting gives me something to hold onto in difficult times when other patients are not doing well. And when I can show others a mutual patient smiling at camp (not on social media/e-mail/texts but rather showing directly from my phone one-on-one with colleagues who know the child), it lightens their load, brightens their day, and helps inspire them to keep going too!"
Practice	"It made me more aware of the problems that sick children face at home and that I need to incorporate that into how I practice medicine."

Recommendations for SeriousFun Camps

1. *Before summer*: Use these findings to highlight positive camp experiences for healthcare providers (including the possibility of a decrease in compassion fatigue) to support our SeriousFun Medical Leaders in their efforts to recruit healthcare providers for camp. Use these findings as justification for hospitals and clinics to encourage their providers to volunteer or work at camp in the summer.
2. *During summer*: Year-round medical staff can structure opportunities for reflection and debriefing in their summer volunteers and seasonal staff. The teams can also generate ideas for ways to transfer positive experiences from camp back to their home hospitals and clinics.
3. *After summer*: Maintain communities and relationships formed in camp. Offer reunions and check-ins to continue professional and personal connections.

More research is needed about opportunities and supports that might help prevent or attenuate symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue which could help healthcare providers cope with challenging workplace environments and situations.