

Post-Polio Wellness Retreat in Northern Michigan: A Model for Others

A post-polio wellness retreat was held September 18-23, 2006, at Bay Cliff Health Camp, located in Big Bay, Michigan, on Lake Superior. Designed and led by Frederick Maynard, MD, and a selected steering committee from the Michigan Polio Network, Post-Polio Health International, Conemaugh Health System in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and Bay Cliff, this experience was sponsored by the Camp and by Marquette General Hospital. Guided by local and “imported” faculty, the residential wellness retreat provided an affordable and unique six-day opportunity for 30 polio survivors and their caregivers to focus on their post-polio health and well-being.

Based on the premise that attention to good health should include all of a person’s interlaced parts – mind, body and spirit – participants attended daily educational sessions. Some were didactic with discussion, including “Ask the Expert” sessions; most were experiential, allowing participants to try many types of exercise, relaxation and recreational activities, and time for contemplation.

With a theme of “Discovery,” the curriculum will be further documented in a professionally produced video and a written curriculum guide – for possible program replication by others.

Participant Comments

Barbara Oniszczak:

“My survivor methods of overcoming polio are the very things that destroy my wellness. To survive now, I must let go of feeling guilty. Let go of all that prevents me from being at peace with myself.

“I have concluded that I need to focus on my wellness, which equals focusing on my husband Ron’s wellness. He has willingly reaffirmed that he will participate in my wellness journey. His generous spirit tells me to let him be generous when he feels he should assist.”



Accessibility at Bay Cliff Health Camp

Ronald Oniszczak:

“As I told my tales of helplessness and worry, many of the other spouses admitted that they had similar problems, but never had an opportunity to openly talk about them.

“As a caregiver, I try to help with the household chores – washing floors, vacuuming, doing the dishes, dusting and cooking. Unfortunately, too many times when I get home from work, some of these tasks are done simply because she felt they needed to be done on that day and at that time.

“Working together as a ‘Survivor Team’, we will accept our different, but loving, lifestyle.” ▲

For more information, contact Frederick M. Maynard, MD, at fmaynard@penmed.com, or Sunny Roller, MA, at elsol@umich.edu, or call her at 734-936-9474.