

# Fortunate to Help

By Sandy Sfikas Wolner, RD, LDN

**Dr. Margaret Cook-Newell, PhD, MS, RD, LD, CDE, CN, is lucky to be in a profession she loves, surrounded by patients and colleagues who continue to inspire her**

Upon being named the 2012 Diabetes Educator of the Year by the Diabetes Care and Education (DCE) practice group, Dr. Margaret Cook-Newell made one thing very clear: "I have to acknowledge and thank all of my colleagues and clients through the years. This award is not all about me—it's about our profession and influencing one another. We are family."

The award comes at a special time for Cook-Newell, who recently left her job after 12 years as lecturer and dietetics director at the University of Kentucky to become a professor at Western Kentucky University. Though the change has been bittersweet at times, she thought to herself, "If I don't apply for the award now, when will I ever do it?"

Working on her application caused her to reflect on the last 30 years as a dietitian and diabetes educator, particularly on all the fun she's had connecting with patients and other professionals in the field. When she finally learned that she won the award, she was honored, delighted, and re-inspired.

Something else that drives her and her commitment to diabetes care and education is her annual trip to Camp Hendon, the Kentucky Diabetes Camp for Children.



"Dr. Maggie," as her campers call her, started as a camp nutritionist back in 1982 and is now on the Board of Directors. Although she has many different roles while at camp, her most important one is to make sure the campers are having fun and learning.

However, the campers aren't the only ones getting an education. "I learn from the 50 other staff members, but I learn the most from the campers," says Cook-Newell. "I learn what it's truly like to live with diabetes. For many kids, this means feeling alone and different from everyone else. At camp, the kids fit in and feel accepted."

The comfort the campers find at Camp Hendon is reassuring, but when asked to summarize what camp is all about, Cook-Newell answers immediately. "First and foremost, diabetes camp is all about fun and family—and by the way, all the campers have diabetes."

Clearly, diabetes care has changed remarkably since Cook-Newell started at Camp Hendon many years ago. "When I first came to camp, kids only took one shot of

insulin per day, and there were no glucose meters," she recalls. "Today, technology has changed so many things about diabetes care. Kids can find information about diabetes everywhere." She also notes that the campers are more self-sufficient and interested in cooking than ever before. "This year, they came up with so many great recipes, including gluten-free recipes, that they wrote them up to save for next year."

Cook-Newell cherishes her Camp Hendon experience so much that she encourages every diabetes professional to attend a camp in order to change his or her perspective on diabetes. "There's incredible work that goes on at camp, which shows the potential of our profession," she says. Her time at Camp Hendon has always made her feel involved, no matter where she's been in her career. And most importantly, she's made invaluable connections with campers, dietitians, and other diabetes professionals.

Camp Hendon is not the only place Cook-Newell has developed significant

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connections, though. For the last 12 years, as part of the faculty at the University of Kentucky, she's helped teach, guide, and influence dietetic students.

Without hesitation, she relates how gratifying it is to watch her students graduate to become active nutrition professionals. She especially loves it when her students "put it all together and just get it." And some of her former students have even ended up working at Camp Hendon.

According to Cook-Newell, the essential traits of successful dietitians and diabetes educators are "effort, attitude, and responsibility." She adds, "Young professionals should also have a sense of curiosity and not be afraid to take action or ask questions. We also have

to be non-judgemental. It's not about telling clients what to do, it's about empowering them to listen to their bodies. These days, dietitians have so much potential to be extremely influential in diabetes management."

In the next chapter in her career, Cook-Newell looks forward to her new role as a professor at Western Kentucky University. The experience will be "something familiar, but totally different," she says.

This is mostly due to the smaller class size and different subject matter. She'll be teaching four classes, including alternative and complementary medicine, and human nutrition. She's especially excited for the human nutrition class, because it's where many unsure students become motivated to pursue nutrition as a major and as a career.

Although teaching to a smaller class size will be a challenge, she welcomes the chance to connect with her students on a one-on-one basis. And, more than anything, she says, "I feel so blessed with the opportunity to reach young people."