

**(W35) “GO FOR THE GOLD!” CPODD’S FIRST ANNUAL RETREAT FOR CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

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**Background:** The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Center for Pediatric Onset Demyelinating Disease (CPODD) is one of six Pediatric MS Centers of Excellence funded by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. To fulfill their common goal of providing excellent care and education to families living with multiple sclerosis (MS), the Alabama Chapter of the Society and CPODD held a Family Retreat in June 2008.

**Objective:** Because the number of children and teens afflicted with MS is relatively small, they often are isolated from other families sharing similar experiences. This Retreat aimed to provide psychosocial and educational support through community-building, as well as recreational opportunities, to these families.

**Program Highlights:** “Go for the Gold,” an Olympic theme, was selected for this year’s Retreat, which was held at a rural retreat center in Talladega, AL. Patients with MS 18 years old and younger who receive clinical care at CPODD, along with their immediate family members, were invited. Alabama Chapter and CPODD staff developed the Retreat schedule with input from patients and their family members via a mailed survey. The schedule included recreational activities, team-building activities, interactive education for the family, and parent roundtable discussions led by clinical experts.

Funding was provided by the Alabama Chapter, CPODD, and charitable donations. This funding allowed the Retreat to be cost-free to families. Transportation assistance was provided as requested. Volunteers were recruited from Children’s Hospital and UAB.

**Outcome:** Thirteen children living with MS, 19 parents, and 29 siblings from six states attended the Retreat. In post-Retreat evaluations, participants reported feeling less isolated and more knowledgeable about MS and that family relationships were strengthened by the Retreat experience. Presently, planning for the Second Annual Family Retreat, to be held in June 2009, is under way to accommodate more families and add an extra day to the event.

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