



Not Just for Kids: Medical Volunteers Feel the Impact of MDA Summer Camp

At MDA Summer Camps, kids with neuromuscular diseases can have traditional camp experiences — enjoying outdoor activities, discovering new interests, and making lifelong friends — in barrier-free environments. Each location in MDA’s nationwide network of camps is unique in its features and facilities, but all are safe and accessible for campers with neuromuscular diseases.

This gives kids the confidence to take on new adventures and discover just how much they can do. Campers often talk about the freedom they feel while spending a week where the world is fully accessible, and they credit camp for helping them develop their independence. It’s why MDA Summer Camp is called “the best week of the year.”

MDA Summer Camp is provided at no cost to families. Volunteer medical staff and counselors make this possible. Every summer, hundreds of generous volunteers support campers during camp activities, games, dances, mealtimes, and more.

We spoke with **Tim Lotze, MD**, a neurologist at Texas Children’s Hospital, and **Abhijit Das, MD**, a neurophysiology fellow at Baylor College of Medicine, who volunteer at an MDA Summer Camp in Texas. Here, they explain why their time at MDA Summer Camp is about a lot more than providing medical care away from home.

Q: How long have you been volunteering at MDA Summer Camp, and why did you first decide to join the medical team?

Dr. Lotze: I've volunteered since 2005, minus a year or two during the pandemic, so I guess 18 years. As the director of the MDA Care Center at Texas Children's, I see it as a chance to have another level of interaction and a different kind of relationship with these children living with neuromuscular conditions. It was that sense of commitment and interest in supporting these kids on more than just the clinical care level that led me to volunteer.

Dr. Das: 2025 was my second year. I went for the first time because Dr. Lotze, who was the program director in my child neurology residency, asked. Then I loved it so much, I just wanted to go back.

Q: What does the Summer Camp medical team do?

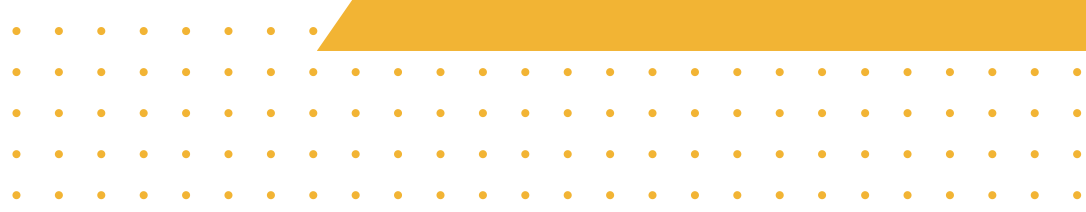
Dr. Lotze: Our overall goal is to make sure everyone has a good time and does it safely. We work in the medical cabin, which is connected to the cafeteria. We have our camp clinic there, the pharmacy, and our rooms to sleep in.

Dr. Das: My main job was making sure campers got their medications. At intake, the parents bring all the kids' medicines for the week, and we make sure they get dispersed appropriately and that the kids take them. We're also on standby in case there are bug bites, scraped knees, first aid needs, stuff like that.



Q: How else do you support campers?

Dr. Lotze: We also spend time hanging out with the campers, making sure everyone's staying hydrated, applying their sunscreen, and those types of things. And that means not necessarily staying in the medical cabin but being there with them as they're fishing, canoeing, doing arts and crafts, on the giant swing, rock wall climbing — all these amazing activities. One thing that always strikes me is how accessible every activity is, especially those you might not think you would encounter at a camp for children who may use a wheelchair or mobility aid.



Q: Do you have a favorite Summer Camp memory?

Dr. Das: The night I always tell people about is the talent show because it is so much fun to see the kids. They come up with these crazy skits with their cabin mates, and they go all out on their costumes. Everyone there is having fun, screaming, and supporting each other as they do solo songs, group sketches, or stand-up routines. That's definitely my favorite night of camp.

Q: What do campers get from the Summer Camp experience?

Dr. Lotze: The great thing about camp is that their parents aren't there, and that really helps to get them out of their shell. They can express themselves in a different way. No one's talking about them to their parents — we're talking to them about what they want to do. I think one of the most important things about camp is that it is a part of the transition process. For a week, they really take ownership of their medical care, what, if any, limitations they have, and maybe things they thought were limitations that they discover are not. That's why I see kids become more mature through the course of camp — they realize that they are able to rely on themselves for many things and voice their needs.

Q: What do you get from the Summer Camp experience?

Dr. Das: To be honest, especially as residents, we only see these patients very briefly in clinic or when they get admitted to the hospital. So, we see these kids' lives when they're sick or in need of escalated support. It was really special to go to camp and not only spend extended time with our patients but also see them acting like children — getting to see them play and have fun.

Dr. Lotze: The relationship that we develop in the clinic is important, but this adds another layer to that. At camp, I see these kids as individuals and learn what their own unique abilities are. For me, it completes the care picture — we're not just prescribing medications and talking about medical things all the time; we're really thinking about their life outside of the clinic. It means being able to celebrate their abilities more than treating their disabilities.



Q: What would you say to a clinician considering volunteering at MDA Summer Camp?

Dr. Lotze: I'd say to reach out to people who have volunteered or talk to one of the kids at the clinic who's been to MDA Summer Camp. I think that they'll hear some very inspiring stories.

MDA Summer Camp medical team guidelines

Summer Camp medical teams include, but are not limited to, neurologists, nurses, and physical and respiratory therapists. Requirements include:

- Complete online application process and submit all required paperwork
- Hold an active license in the state the Summer Camp is held

Find MDA Summer Camp locations and apply as a volunteer at:

- <https://www.mda.org/summer-camp/volunteer>
- [Summer Camp Medical Volunteer Recruitment Flyer.pdf](#)