

# Ventilation-assisted Children's Center Camp

The goal of the Ventilation-Assisted Children's Center (VACC) at MCH is to return ventilation-assisted children home to achieve as normal a life as possible.

Children with tracheotomies, ventilators or oxygen therapy — who are alive thanks to their contrived and complicated machinery — learn to play, swim in the pool, weave through the woods, sail around Key Biscayne and feel free... all this is accomplished at VACC.

**Moises Simpson, M.D., FAAP, FCCP,** director of the Division of Pulmonology at MCH and founder-director of the VACC Camp, spends a week every year volunteering at this camp. These patients and some of the families faced with ventilation-assisted living get to laugh, play, relate and, sometimes momentarily, forget about the challenges.

Dr. Simpson started the camp 13 years ago, the first camp in the world to cater to ventilator-dependent kids. Since then one of his nurses started a camp in Minnesota and others have opened throughout the country, and this is music to Dr. Simpson's ears, as his goal is to reach more people with

awareness for these children. "There should be a camp for these children in every state," he says.

MCH has the most comprehensive and only family-oriented camp. From \$15,000 to \$20,000 is earmarked each year for camp expenses. Funding is derived mostly from good hearts and willing souls in the community, including medical professionals and about 200 teenage volunteers.

"It's what medicine used to be. A lot of people at MCH participate. We need a lot of support — it's a very sophisticated camp," Dr. Simpson says.

It's easy to understand why some ventilator-dependent children become prisoners of their equipment. Each camper's family brings a special wheelchair, portable ventilator, suction machine, oximeter, liquid oxygen tank, air compressor, Nebulizer, bladder catheter, mucus vibrator, feeding tube and medications and accessories necessary to run the equipment. Yet once they arrive at VACC, the campers and families feel at home with others who face similar challenges.



*Swimming is a rare activity for a ventilation-assisted child.*

The campsite is at A.D. Barnes Park. Local campers come for the day and return home at night; while visitors from out of the area sleep in bunkhouses at the site. The week-long experience is free for participants; families only pay their own travel to and from Miami. The next scheduled camp is during Spring break in April 1999.

VACC has been a great adventure to some 170 families. The only downside, as a camper recently said, is that it has to end.



*The only downside to VAAC camp, as a camper recently said, is that it has to end.*