

## Images of Isolation

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Recently, I had the privilege to be involved in the launch of a new initiative, which represents a novel and significant step in educating the public about individuals with atopic dermatitis (AD). On October 17, 2006, the National Eczema Association, celebrity photographer Jeremy Kost, and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation announced the debut of *Images of Isolation*, a photographic essay designed to visually represent the impact eczema has on the lives of patients with this chronic disease and to allow the patients to share their stories. More than 35 million Americans have eczema.<sup>1</sup> The launch in October coincided with national eczema awareness month.

Kost is known for his unique use of a Polaroid® camera to photograph celebrities such as Sarah Jessica Parker, Tom Cruise, and Beyoncé Knowles. His poignant photographs of children and adults with eczema for *Images of Isolation* focus on the people, portraying individuals in everyday settings, rather than focusing on eczema. The photographs, along with the stories from individuals with eczema, vividly express their experiences. “For years I have photographed celebrities who embrace the spotlight and thought it would be interesting to turn my camera to people, who sometimes feel isolated and alone,” said Kost at the media launch. “What I learned is that eczema has a powerful, isolating effect. I hope these pictures and stories will help others with the condition live fuller lives.”<sup>1</sup>

The International Study of Life With Atopic Eczema (ISOLATE) study, revealing the extent of the emotional impact of AD, was inspiration for this photographic essay.<sup>2</sup> ISOLATE, a large-scale study, was designed to assess the effect of AD on the lives of patients and society, how patients and caregivers manage the condition, and how well patients and caregivers currently believe that AD is controlled. For the

study, 2002 patients (aged >13 years) and caregivers of children aged 2 to 13 years with moderate to severe eczema randomly were selected from 8 countries and underwent standardized telephone interviews using questions developed in collaboration with national eczema patient groups and physicians.<sup>2</sup>

The investigators found that patients spend, on average, 1 of 3 days in flare each year.<sup>2</sup> While the majority of patients receive prescription topical corticosteroids to treat flares, 49% of respondents were concerned about using these agents. On average, patients and caregivers delayed commencing treatment for 7 days after onset of a flare. Of note, 74% of patients and caregivers stated that their physicians had never discussed the emotional impact that eczema has had on their lives. The authors also observed that 75% of caregivers and patients felt that being able to effectively control eczema would be the single most important improvement to their quality of life or their child’s quality of life. Zuberbier et al<sup>2</sup> concluded that ISOLATE highlights the need to improve patients’ control of AD to reduce the substantial effect this condition has on patients and society. In addition, because patients with AD are untreated for half the time they are in flare, there is an urgent need for physicians to ensure that the patients are educated and confident in using medication as prescribed to gain disease control.<sup>2</sup>

*Images of Isolation* and the ISOLATE study hopefully will enhance the public’s understanding of the true nature of AD. Both initiatives elucidate ways in which physicians may approach our patients with AD more comprehensively, with an increased focus on education and the emotional impact of the disease.

### REFERENCES

1. Celebrity photographer Jeremy Kost creates *Images of Isolation* to empower eczema patients to share their stories and take control [press release]. San Rafael, Calif: National Eczema Association; October 17, 2006.
2. Zuberbier T, Orlow SJ, Paller AS, et al. Patient perspectives on the management of atopic dermatitis. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2006;118:226-232.

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