A Conversation with Katya Peri

CSPA Committee Member: Affiliate Members, Breaking Barriers

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Why did you get involved with CSPA?

As a medical student with a strong interest in dermatology, I was drawn to CSPA because it sits at the intersection of patient advocacy and clinical care, two things I care deeply about. But my motivation goes beyond academic interest. I live with a skin condition myself, and that personal experience shaped how I see medicine. I remember the frustration of searching for reliable information, the self-consciousness of living in a body that felt unpredictable, and the relief of finally feeling understood by someone who got it. When I learned about CSPA and the work it does to support and advocate for people with skin conditions, I knew I wanted to be part of it. It felt like an opportunity to channel my own experience into something meaningful, to be for others what I once needed myself. CSPA offered me a way to contribute during my training, not after it.

What do you see as the outcomes of your involvement?

I believe my involvement contributes to CSPA in a few meaningful ways. As someone who straddles both the patient and medical communities, I can help bridge the gap between clinical language and lived experience, making information more accessible and relatable to patients who may feel overwhelmed or dismissed by the healthcare system. I also hope that my presence as a medical student signals to patients that the next generation of physicians is listening and paying attention. On a broader level, I think volunteers like me help CSPA extend its reach and capacity, allowing the organization to do more with the resources it has. Most importantly, if my involvement helps even one patient feel less alone in their diagnosis, or more confident in advocating for themselves, then it has been worthwhile. Patient empowerment is at the heart of what CSPA does, and I am glad to support that mission.

Why do you enjoy volunteering with CSPA?

Volunteering with CSPA has genuinely made me a better medical student and a more compassionate future physician. In clinical training, it is easy to get caught up in the science of disease, the pathophysiology, the treatment algorithms, the differential diagnoses. CSPA reminds me of the human being behind the condition. Spending time in this space keeps me grounded in what truly matters: the patient's experience. I also find it incredibly rewarding to be part of a community where people speak openly about the emotional and social toll of living with a skin condition. Those conversations are rarely had in a clinic setting, yet they are so important. Beyond the personal growth, I genuinely enjoy the people, the staff, fellow volunteers, and the patients whose stories inspire me constantly. CSPA has become a meaningful part of my journey.

What would you say to encourage others to get involved with CSPA?

I would say this: whatever you bring to the table, CSPA can use it. You do not need to be a doctor or a researcher or a policy expert to make a real difference here. You simply need to care. If you are a patient, your story is powerful, sharing it can help others feel seen and less alone. If you are a student or healthcare professional, your knowledge and enthusiasm can help educate and empower a community that is hungry for trustworthy information. Volunteering with CSPA is also a two-way street: you will grow just as much as you give. In a world where chronic illness is often invisible or misunderstood, CSPA is doing vital work to change that narrative. Being part of that change is deeply fulfilling. I encourage anyone who feels even a small pull toward this cause to reach out, your contribution matters more than you know!

Has a personal connection with the skin patient community inspired your participation?

Beyond my own experience, there is one patient I met during clinical training who has stayed with me. She was a woman in her mid-thirties who came in for what seemed, on the surface, like a routine follow-up for her psoriasis. Her skin was largely under control that day, but when the physician asked how she was really doing, she broke down. She described years of avoiding swimming pools, cancelling plans, and feeling like people stared at her in public. She said she had never met anyone else with her condition and felt completely alone in it. What struck me most was that her disease was being managed, but she was not. Nobody had pointed her toward a support network, a community, or resources beyond her prescription. That moment crystallized something for me. Dermatology is not just about treating skin, it is about treating the whole person. It is part of why I found my way to CSPA, an organization that understands that distinction and builds its entire mission around it.

CSPA Canadian Skin Patient Alliance

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Educate.
Empower.