

## Dr. Jonathan Silverberg's Story

### Provider

*“There are tremendous disparities in this disease, and this is a very active conversation right now within clinical dermatology. We're working to minimize disparities and improve quality of care, not just clinically but socioeconomically and across racial and ethnic divides as well. The field is undergoing a frameshift in how research is being done. Doctors need to treat their patients as individuals, and payers need to understand how progressive and life-threatening eczema can be.”*

- Jonathan I Silverberg, MD, PhD, MPH

Jonathan Silverberg, MD, PhD, MPH is a Professor of Dermatology at The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Washington, D.C., and the Director of Clinical Research and Contact Dermatitis. He became interested in researching atopic dermatitis (AD) more than a decade ago. The most significant change he's seen amongst his peers in that time is an increase in professional recognition that this is a chronic, progressive, life-long disease, despite what is taught in the literature. The most significant change he's seen in his patients is an increased hope that something can be done. He notes that the breakthroughs are many and heartening, but there is still no cure, no magic bullet, and a lot of work to be done.

When Dr. Silverberg first began practicing, many of his patients had given up on the medical system. Despite wide variations in efficacy and sometimes harmful side effects, steroids and topical creams were the primary options offered by providers and patients often felt lumped into one big category rather than being treated as individuals. Disparities in access and care created significant divides between patients who could try new or experimental treatments and those who could not. While many of these issues persist to this day, over the past ten years, providers like Dr. Silverberg have begun making a dent in undertreatment rates. And science has gained a much better understanding of how heterogeneous AD is and how things like the microbiome and immunology impact the skin's barrier in different ways. Investments in drug development from topical to oral to injectable to new therapy modalities have drawn more clinician researchers like Dr. Silverberg to the field and generated new efforts to find systemic therapies that work for more people.

In addition to seeking better therapies for their patients, Dr. Silverberg and his peers are also working to improve access and educate payers about how progressive and life-threatening AD can be for many people. He points out that current regulatory definitions (e.g., mild-moderate, moderate-severe) are crude and inaccurate and need to be modernized to better reflect the diversity of patient experiences. The travesty, he explains, is that patients are still being denied access to vitally important therapies from both public and private insurance because payors don't understand or appreciate the toll this disease takes.

This is a systems-based problem that requires a system-based solution. We're not going to fix it overnight. But by better understanding and educating others about the disease burden, and by making a point to listen, even in the short time providers have with their patients, we can help to build trust and improve outcomes. It will take hard work, but Dr. Silverberg thinks we're headed in the right direction. With focused investments that support eczema research and bring young, talented scientists to this field, and with updated regulatory definitions that reflect patients' lived experiences, we'll be able to develop much-needed new treatment options and ensure that they are accessible.