Kym Harper is a pretty typical 25-year-old. The recent college graduate likes going to concerts. She’s interested in writing. She’s working an office job.

But two years ago, spots appeared all over Kym’s body. Her family doctor thought the rash was caused by strep throat. Antibiotics and a steroid treatment didn’t help, and when she stopped the medications, Kym quickly developed full-blown plaque psoriasis over much of her body.

Creams and lotions were ineffective. High copayments made ultraviolet light therapy too expensive. Kym’s social life and self-esteem were suffering.

“I became a different person. I was really depressed,” she remembers.

Finally, Kym sought expert treatment at Case Western Reserve University’s Murdough Family Center for Psoriasis in Cleveland. “I saw six different doctors in three hours,” she says. She got a prescription for a more effective medication, and life started to improve.

Though her psoriasis is under control, Kym now knows that living with a chronic disease is difficult in other ways. She is afraid of losing her insurance coverage if she were to change jobs.

“It’s another set of worries with the job market, because there is no guarantee that [a new job’s] insurance will cover my medication,” she said.

Kym has connected with the National Psoriasis Foundation (NPF) and traveled to Washington, D.C., to talk to elected officials and their staff members about important psoriasis legislation. Even though her psoriasis no longer shows up on her skin, she wants to remind leaders that a chronic disease is always there.

“What if you woke up tomorrow and you had something all over you?”

“Before, I would have said the most important thing is research,” she said after a recent visit to Capitol Hill. “Now I think the most important thing is awareness. To understand what it is like for people to feel so helpless and so constrained. I have to bring it down to a human level and say, ‘What if you woke up tomorrow and you had something all over you?’”

A recent NPF survey found that 67 percent of women said that psoriasis negatively affects their overall emotional well-being, compared with 57 percent of men.