The re-ignition of the South African Burn Society

The South African Burn Society (SABS) is dedicated to the prevention of burn injuries, the promotion of comprehensive burn care and the development of research in the field. We are responsible for setting and maintaining the highest clinical and ethical standards. This is achieved by developing best clinical guidelines, both with regard to practical application and advice for policy-makers and funders. Further regular meetings and congresses at which to exchange knowledge and ideas and to foster professional relations with other societies and paramedical fields facilitates this.

Although 32 years old, the SABS has been dormant for a number of years, but has been re-ignited and is slowly growing through the dedication and passion of its executive committee. A number of remarkable clinicians around the country with a wealth of knowledge and experience are dedicated to the care of burn patients. However, they are mostly isolated and often unsupported. We need to come together. It is imperative to work together to create the critical mass necessary for change in the arena of burns. I believe that this can be achieved in a number of ways.

The multidisciplinary team is at the core of achieving a successful outcome for the patient. Good communication among doctors, nurses and the allied health professionals, as well as the growth of a broad network, offers better care for the patient through academic support and sharing of knowledge and clinical experiences, and also a psychological support structure for the healthcare professional.

The development of national guidelines and standards is underway so that local standards of care can be ascertained against which to benchmark current management. Quality improvement initiatives can then be implemented. Advancing this is imminent through the use of an electronic national database. Similarly, an audit of available burn services around the country is being performed as we work towards an accreditation system that will allow improvement and upliftment of current units and services. We will finally be able to gauge current available services and be able to create a national disaster plan.

Recognition and a qualification in managing burns in the form of a diploma and subspecialisation will contribute significantly to attracting generalists and specialists to the field and fostering academic advancement, which ultimately leads to an improvement in patient care and outcome.

Cadavre skin is life saving for major burn injuries, and through cooperation and partnership with a number of organisations (Bone SA, the Centre for Tissue Engineering, the Cornea and Eye Association, the Netcare transplant coordinators and the Organ Donor Foundation), we are making exciting progress with regard to the formation of a national skin bank for South Africa.

Local research is on the increase and contributes to raising the profile of burns as a speciality in South Africa. It is important to build up a local body of knowledge with regard to our spectrum of injuries, the challenges that we face and the solutions that we generate. We create international networks and bring knowledge through publications, presentations at congresses and overseas fellowships.

Collaboration with other organisations with similar goals strengthens the impact of what we do. The Household Energy Safety Association of South Africa focuses on broad household energy safety issues, including research, education and policy advocacy to prevent energy-related incidents. We have partnered with them so that we can jointly embark on a national prevention campaign.

Wound Healing South Africa is an online journal which strives toward the publication of original research that is of importance to specialists allied to wound care, general practitioners and nursing and allied professions. This is a fantastic platform through which to share information. Authors of burn-related topics are invited to submit their work for publication and to contribute to our combined growth.

Wonderbag® is a heat retention-cooking device developed to ease the social, economic and environmental impact created by current global circumstances. It contributes to burn prevention in the home by reducing the time of direct heat. This makes Wonderbag® an important partner to the SABS. Bags have been generously donated to families of admitted children and we hope to integrate them into large communities over time to reduce the incidence of burns in the home.

Educating nurses, doctors and allied health professionals and mentoring and nurturing individual growth is crucial in fostering inspiration and making a career in burns possible and rewarding, and also in improving care for the patient. It is important to remember that as we grow, we will to reach out to the rest of Africa. Our long-term vision is to develop relationships with other African countries and their burn units. A huge task is ahead of us, but we are not afraid to work hard and long to overcome the challenges.

Dr Nikki Allorto
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