

Burns Awareness Day

Meher Binte Ali, Mashal Binte Ali

Madam, every year the British Burn Association celebrates its National Burns Awareness Day, this year it being on 17th October.¹ The day seeks to remind people of the suffering of burn victims and increase awareness regarding burn prevention and management. In Britain a considerable number of people suffer from burn injuries every year; however, majority of burn injuries and deaths happen in low and middle-income countries. And among them Pakistan has one of the highest mortality rates of 6.5%.²

This may be due to the fact, that despite the heavy burden of burn victims, there are very few burn care centers in Pakistan. A 50-bed burn unit is required at every district head quarter hospital of the province to reduce fatality rate in severe burns cases.³ Alarmingly though, there are only a handful of functioning burn care centers in Pakistan. Adding to that thought, the protocols for burn treatment are not being followed at the already available state-run health facilities. For example, burn units should have a sterilized isolated environment with separate bathrooms and tubs to prevent cross infections which is not seen being practiced in majority of the burn centers in Pakistan. Thus, burn care centers themselves may be a cause for severe complications in these patients.

Physiological complications like contractures and scarring cause disfigurement of the victim, directly leading to the harrowing psychological effects. The victims suffer from PTSD, depression and may even have suicidal tendencies. These problems are often unrecognized, and the victims may be forced to live with the physiological and

Dow Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi.

Correspondence: Meher Binte Ali. e-mail: meher59@hotmail.com

psychological scars for life. Thus, quality of life is greatly impaired adding to the morbidity of burn injuries.⁴ To cater to this unrecognized population, in addition to emergency burn care centers, rehabilitative services and psychiatric support should be provided too.

Overall, awareness regarding burn injuries and its complications is at rock bottom in Pakistan. The government and health authorities of Pakistan need to acknowledge the dismal plight of burn survivors and take measures to combat the rising burden of burn victims. We also need to spread awareness regarding prevention and first aid management of burns to the public, as most burn injuries occur at home which are easily preventable.⁵ Only by these measures can we counter Pakistan's high rate of burn mortality and morbidity. Lastly, isn't it time for Pakistan to start marking its own Burns Awareness Day?

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