

news THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT DALLAS

southwestern medical school - graduate school of biomedical sciences - school of allied health sciences

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FOR RELEASE: 10 A.M. FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 1973

DALLAS--Declaring there has been no improvement in survival of burn patients in the last six years, the president of the American Burn Association today called for greater emphasis on funding research and a redirection of major studies.

Dr. Charles Baxter, professor of surgery at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, said analysis of survival statistics in 7,500 cases reported by ten units of the National Burn Information Exchange "lead us to ask whether our fundamental knowledge is increasing at a pace commensurate with our physical development."

Comparing burn research to other areas, he said government research expenditures through the National Institutes of Health amount to over \$2 a day per hospitalized patient in cancer, \$2.50 per patient in heart disease, but only 1.7 cents a day for each burn patient.

Dr. Baxter also questioned the major direction of current burn research: "Several categories easily identified by all of us as major problem areas are receiving little attention: The problems of skin transplantation, infection as well as chemical and mechanical debridement techniques have commanded little support.

"Notably absent from current lists of research projects are such fields as psychiatry, physical medicine, bioengineering, neurology and basic biochemical and pharmacological studies. All of these and many more constitute ripe areas for thoughtful and well-planned investigation."

There has been progress in other areas of burn care during the past five years, noted the specialist.

"These years have been distinguished by the rapid increase in the number of burn care facilities, an increasing interest of larger numbers of physicians, nurses and paramedical personnel, including industry.

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"The established, expanding program of prevention has already resulted in beginning legislation concerning childrens' clothing, stimulated research in fire retardant clothing and initiated progress in other areas of fire and explosion prevention," said Dr. Baxter.

He said the number of burn treatment facilities has increased from a handful to more than 90 hospitals with specialized care areas.

"The total number of specialized beds, now numbering slightly less than 900, has doubled since 1969. While we still need 7,000 burn intensive care beds to care for the 90,000 major burn injuries each year, the increase is nevertheless impressive."

Dr. Baxter pointed to a need to attract medical, nursing and para-medical specialists into the burn field. Although post-doctoral research fellowships in burn research have been available for 20 years, only one fellowship is currently utilized.

He noted that the first program aimed at development for burn nurses was initiated two months ago by the NIH Institute of Nursing. This is a two-year program of training in clinical care, delivery, training in development, administration, teaching and basic research methods.

"While our group has made meaningful strides toward establishment of burn treatment facilities we are, however, failing to achieve balanced development or equal scientific sophistication by research development and personnel training," declared Dr. Baxter. "Unless the table is balanced, there will ultimately occur a decline in clinical care, not just a failure of improvement in burn survival," he said, concluding, "The only thing standing in the way of our achieving these goals is lack of dollar power."

APRIL 5, 1973