



New Patterns of Burn Injuries

Although most paediatric burn injuries in South Africa are still caused by poverty, over-crowding and the use of basic sources of energy for lighting, cooking and heating, the gradual introduction of electricity and modern electrical appliances, such as electric kettles and microwave ovens, is causing a change in the patterns of burn injuries being seen in paediatric burn units.

Even supposedly safer alternative technologies, such as gel fuel stoves in the place of paraffin stoves, have resulted in some unanticipated, serious burn injuries. Gels are promoted as a safe alternative to paraffin because, being much more viscous than paraffin, splashing is reduced, and a fire is therefore more contained. This gives users a false sense of security.

However, gel fuels must *never* be poured onto a naked flame, as the fire can literally “creep” up the flowing gel column, into the bottle, literally causing an explosion.

The resultant burn injury is further exacerbated by the fact that the sticky burning gel fuel is difficult to remove from the burn victim. Being highly viscous, it doesn't run off, but rather adheres to the skin. Furthermore, frantic attempts by the victim to wipe off the gel leads to hand and finger burns.

With the domestic appliance market saturated with a great variety of electrical devices, such as microwave ovens, prices have fallen within reach of those previously unable to afford such devices. New patterns of burn injuries are emerging with increasing microwave oven use.

Water and other fluids heated in microwave ovens reach very high temperatures, as well as warming up the container – particularly ceramics. This leads to contact burns, followed by dropping the cup or container, leading to severe scalds. Burns from microwave-prepared

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Illegal tapping of electricity in South African townships is a significant cause of burn injuries in children.

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instant noodles are particularly common.

Cooking eggs in a microwave oven can lead to explosion of the eggs on opening of the oven door as a slight cooling causes the eggshell to crack. Tapping on the shell of a very hot microwaved egg can also initiate cracking of the shell, resulting in explosive release of the hot contents. More studies need to be conducted to determine safe practices in this regard.

As more and more informal settlements become electrified, new burn injury patterns have emerged. A common cause of electrical burns is due to illegal tapping of electrical power with unsafe connections and low overhanging power cables. Injuries result from children climbing on roofs and trees and touching these cables. Severe electrical hand burns are encountered, commonly resulting in finger and hand amputations.

Metal theft for the illegal trade in scrap metals has led to the removal of many cover plates on electrical poles and transformer substations. Children place their hands in these hazardous areas, resulting in severe electrical hand injuries.

There is still significant ignorance of the necessity to use wood, plastic, rubber, or other non-conducting materials when removing an electrical shock victim from a live electrical connection. The instinctive reaction to pull a child away from a current source often turns the rescuer into another victim.

Unlike wool, cotton and linen, which are fire resistant, synthetic fabrics, such as those often employed in party dresses, ignite readily and melt quickly, sticking to the skin, thus exacerbating flame burn injuries.

The common electrical kettle remains the number one cause for admissions to paediatric burn units. This is across all socioeconomic groups and typically results from toddlers pulling on power cords within reach. This form of burn injury could be drastically reduced through legislative banning of unsafe devices.

Although technology has changed the causes of burns and the management of burn wounds, the basic first aid for all burns remains keeping the burn under cool running tap water for at least 20 minutes. This stops the burning process and ultimately reduces the size of the burn.

Support for parents

For burnt children and their families, the long road to recovery involves not only an emotional and physical cost, but also a financial one. Financial pressures make it harder to provide the basics of good nutrition, let alone the small, often expensive essentials required by burn victims such as sunscreen and sunhats. Where possible, Phoenix provides practical assistance to individual families according to need. One such family is that of Elisabeth M., a resident of Diazville near Saldanha, who has care of her 6-year old nephew, Sohuil. At the age of 1, Sohuil was injured in a fire that claimed both his parents' lives. He sustained burns to his head and face, torso and both arms. Elisabeth took him in and has been caring for him ever since. She has undertaken many trips to Red Cross for follow-up treatments and surgery. Each trip involves several hours on the road and requires catching three taxis one-way, if an ambulance is not available. While trips to the hospital have come to an end for the time being, further recovery now requires the maintenance of sun protection and scar management. Phoenix stays in regular contact with Elisabeth and Sohuil and provides assistance where needed.

A burn survivor shares her experiences

At the 2011 SA Burn Congress, Phoenix's Project Coordinator, May Bleeker-Phelan described the emotional life of the burnt child and highlighted the powerful position that doctors hold in shaping children's experiences during burns treatment and rehabilitation. Using her own experience of what it is like to be a burnt child, she described the secondary trauma that takes place during burns treatment, and how small acts of kindness or callousness may leave a lasting impression during a highly painful and intense experience in a child's life. The impact of these experiences lasts well into adulthood and may even become the theme of a person's life. Bleeker-Phelan praised the medical fraternity for their contributions to children's physical recovery and urged those present to give more attention to the everyday emotional experiences of their patients and to make emotional rehabilitation a priority in burns care.



Action for Burns Hike/Bike Charity Challenge raises over £20,000 for burn survivors

In October 2011, 20 bikers and hikers from the United Kingdom, France and Abu Dhabi came to South Africa to participate in the gruelling Action for Burns and Children's Charity Challenge in aid of Phoenix. The hikers, led by Carolyn Cripps OBE, who represents Phoenix in the United Kingdom, did a 6-day trek through the Cederberg. The bikers, led by Mike Cripps of Cripps Sears & Partners, did a 6-day cycle tour from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town along the Garden Route.

Both groups met in Cape Town on 28 October and exchanged stories of the many hardships faced along the way, as well as the many memorable moments. A genuine camaraderie developed among all the participants.

On the 29th of October the group visited the Burns Unit at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, to learn about the work of the Burns Unit. They also brought smiles to the

faces of children in the ward by handing out teddy bears. Afterwards, the group visited the townships of Langa, Bonteheuwel, Gugulethu, Nyanga, Cross Roads and Khayelitsha, where they were able to see the typical fire hazards experienced by people living in such communities.

The following individuals participated in the ABC Hike/Bike Charity Challenge:

Bikers: Mike Cripps, Nick Cripps, Oliver Cripps, Christopher Dunlop, Harry Fildes, Fergus Gilmour, Ben Green, Edward Larmour, Phil Loader, Scott Loader, James McDonald, Anthony Mellalieu, Mark Scollay, Andrew Somerville, Andrew Sutherland

Hikers: Carolyn Cripps, Abigail Deem, Laura Gaze, Francois Lebailly, Graham Spencer

To all these heroes, we say a big THANK YOU!



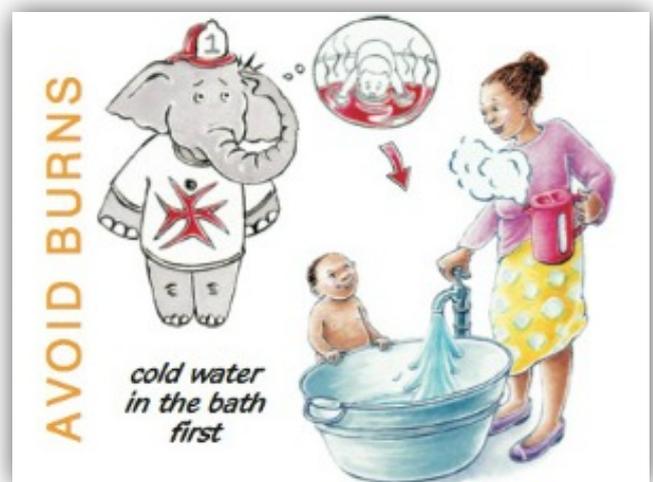
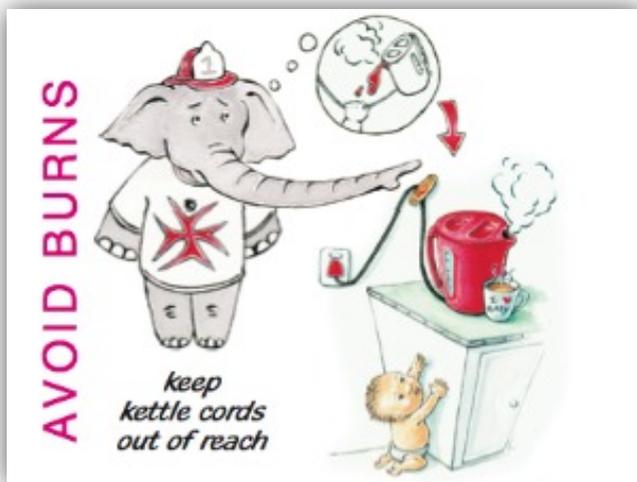
Missed the 2011 ABC Charity Challenge? Join the 2012 ABC Charity Challenge!

Visit abc-challenge.com or call 082 932 9504 in South Africa or +44 (0) 20 7440 8999 for more information.

Phoenix develops safety messages

A significant component of Phoenix's activities falls in the area of burn prevention through education and outreach to communities at risk. These activities are normally conducted with several partner organisations to promote the safe use of paraffin, hot water and electricity. Children are taught how to 'stop, drop and roll' in the event of their clothing catching on fire. They are also taught to memorise the contact numbers for the emergency services. These

events often culminate in a 'safety information quiz' and a prize giving. To encourage families to 'take the message home', Phoenix has developed series of 'safety messages' in sticker and poster format. The posters are used as a visual aid during presentations and the stickers are given to parents and children, to be placed as reminders in high-burn-risk areas of the home, such as on kettles, bathtubs, and stoves. Some examples are shown below.



Bishops Prep donates R61,000 to Children's Hospital Trust for burns care

In April 2011 teachers at the Diocesan College Preparatory School (Bishops) in Cape Town participated in the Bishops Bike for Burns charity bike ride in aid of burn survivors. The four-day, 300km event raised R112,000 in just five weeks. This funding enabled Phoenix to implement numerous activities in support of burn survivors. The Phoenix Burns Project and Bishops Preparatory School also handed over R61,203 to the Children's Hospital Trust at a special school assembly at Bishops Preparatory School on 30 November 2011. In accepting this donation, the Trust's representative, Ms Jeneé Stamer said that these funds would go towards purchasing equipment for the new Specialist Burns Unit at the Red Cross Children's Hospital.



Ms Jeneé Stamer of the Children's Hospital Trust received the donation from Bishops Preparatory Headmaster Mr Greg Brown (right) and Phoenix's Project Coordinator, May Bleeker-Phelan (centre).

Thank YOU! We gratefully thank all our individual donors. We also gratefully thank the following organisations: Action for Burns and Children, Bishops Preparatory School, Catalyst Communications, Catholic Women's League, Catholic Church of Constantia, Cripps Sears and Partners and the ROSE Foundation.