

NEW BURNS INJURY GUIDELINES FOR RURAL AREAS

By Dr David Campbell, Director, Skilled Medical

This year, as we all reflect on the 2009 Black Saturday fires, it is apparent that Australia's worst natural disaster, resulting in 173 deaths and 414 injuries changed the lives and hearts of many Australians forever. This tragedy brought about a greater awareness for the need of bush fire preparation, safety and increased burn injury research and treatment knowledge particularly in rural and regional health service organisations and hospitals.

"The medical response to bushfires and burn injuries needs to be as effective as possible," said Dr David Campbell, the Director of Skilled Medical Pty Ltd, a firm that supplies locum and permanent doctors across Australia. "More research is required to inform the medical management of burns, from first-aid through to rehabilitation."

According to "Black Saturday: The Immediate Impact of the February 2009 Bushfires in Victoria, Australia" research published in The Australian Medical Journal of Australia, there were 414 patients who went to hospital as a result of the Black Saturday bushfires. Burn victims were triaged at the scene, treatment centres and in hospital. Twenty-two (18 adults) burns patients went to Victoria burns referrals centres. Adult burns patients who went to The Alfred spent 48.7 hours in theatre in the first 72 hours. In addition, there were an additional 390 bushfire related burns across the state within the first 72 hours of the disaster.

Burn injuries in Australia and throughout the world are a serious public health problem yet one that is often under reported easily overlooked and underfunded/researched. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) burn injuries (from smoke inhalation, heat, chemicals, electricity, and radiation) are a serious global public health problem and fire-related causes are in the top 15 causes of mortality among children and young adults 15-29 years. In many Australian rural and regional health service organisations and hospitals, there is a great need for burn patient "best practice" guidelines for early treatment of minor and severe burn injuries and burn wound care.

In response to the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires in Victoria, Skilled Medical wanted to support a practical project that aimed at improving health outcomes for people with burn injuries living in rural and regional areas. Skilled Medical is currently collaborating with The Alfred in Victoria to fund a medical research study conducted by the Victorian Adult Burns Service to improve the care and management of patients with burn injuries in non-specialist settings.

"Our \$40,000 donation is funding a major study entitled, "A project to improve the care of patients with burn injury in a non-specialist setting," said Dr. David Campbell. "The study will result in the development of new burn management guidelines for use by doctors and nurses in the field and will assist with the early treatment of burns to help achieve better clinical outcomes for burn injury patients. The study's new website www.vicburns.org.au and guidelines were released in 2011.

Last year, Skilled Medical introduced its Social Responsibility Program that includes funding annual health care projects relevant to its sphere of influence that support its service role, the medical practitioners they work with and the numerous communities they serve. Skilled Medical is pleased to be an organisation contributing to advances in medical care.

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