

First 'skin bank' in SA, become a donor

2015-06-03 06:01 - Nicole John

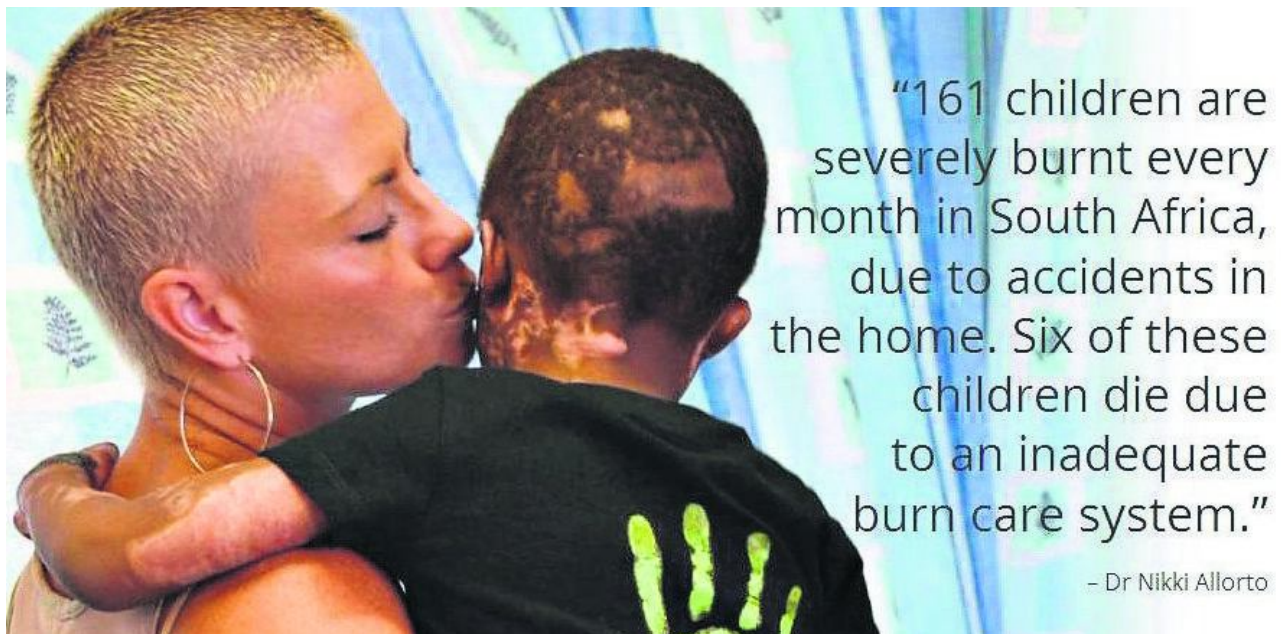


PHOTO: burncare.co.za Dr Nikki Allorto, founder of the Burn Care Trust has one aim - to improve care of burn patients.

FOUNDER of the Burn Care Trust, specialist burn surgeon Dr Nikki Allorto, sat with Maritzburg Fever to discuss her passion for, and raise awareness about, burn care.

When Allorto began as a junior surgeon 10 years ago she realised how little attention was paid to burn victims and as time went on, she felt the need to do something to address the problem.

"Subsequently, everything I have done in my career has been to bring about change for the care of burn victims. "Working with children with burns is distressing. It's hard on your heart to have to deal with them when they are in pain and disfigured," she said.

Allorto is the head of a burn care unit in a Pietermaritzburg hospital and is the president of the South African Burn Society. She has been working through her organisation and meeting stakeholders to improve burn care which requires an array of specialist doctors.

This week will mark the launch of the www.recycleme.co.za website which aims to encourage people to become tissue donors.

The first "skin bank" in South Africa recently opened and is headed by people in the field of tissue grafting.

Allorto appealed to the public to become tissue donors.

"Cadaver skin is an essential component in the success of the skin bank. Donating your tissue can save up to 60 lives.

"When a person is a tissue donor a thin layer of skin from their arms, legs and back is removed allowing them to still have a dignified funeral."

Donor skin is used as a temporary skin graft allowing the persons own skin to recover before another

graft of their own skin is completed.

"Sometimes burn patients have most of their skin burnt and only a small part of their own skin can be grafted.

"In the meantime, to cover the healthy area that was grafted, the donor skin can be used."

Donor skin can be used on anyone regardless of their race or age.

"This gives a whole new meaning to our rainbow nation," said Allorto.

She said that the main focus for the SA Burns Society was to promote the message of awareness.

"We had five messages that we focused on. Watch out for the kettle cord, put the cold water in the bath first, candle in a jar not on a plate, be aware of wires and watch out for the pot handles."

Allorto said it is important for the public to dispel the myth that only children who are neglected are victims of household burns.

"This is a common misconception, but people need to understand that the most present mother can turn her back for a second and their child can get burnt.

"Burns can happen to anyone, at any time."

Allorto said this is the first year there has been such a major campaign for burn awareness and only through consistent and repeated awareness drives will the message be received and start to have an impact on the statistics.

"Our focus at the Burn Care Trust is to improve care offered to the patient and to train nurses and doctors on the proper treatment for burn victims.

"This will help not only with decreasing the mortality rate among burn victims, but also improve the overall care of burn victims," said Allorto.

For more information visit www.burncare.co.za or www.recycleme.co.za to sign up as a tissue donor.

What not to do:

- Do not pop or remove blisters.
- Do not put ice on the burn/s.
- Do not use home remedies like coffee, butter, toothpaste, mustard, soy sauce and milk. The patient stands a greater chance of infection and further wound damage if these substances are used.

What to do:

- Rinse the burn wound under clean cool running water.
- Seek medical attention or advice.
- Call the ER24 emergency contact centre on 084 124 for assistance with medical advice if unsure