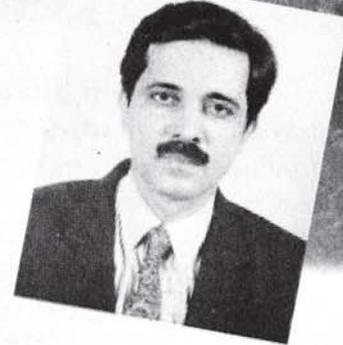


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BURNING ISSUE

By Betty D'Souza

Interview with Dr. Sunil Keswani



In the October, November and December Issues of My Doctor, we dealt with measures to keep safe from burns, the causes of burn accidents during Divali and the larger issue for treatment of burns and the social causes of these accidents.

This information was given to us by the courtesy of Dr. Sunil Keswani, an active member of the Burns Association of India. In this interview we profile Dr. Sunil Keswani, to get a more sympathetic appreciation of the suffering a victim of burns undergoes.

Q What inspired you to work for victims of burns?

A My father Dr. M.H.Keswani founded the Burns Association of India. I was, therefore, exposed to the sufferings of burn victims at an early age. The inadequate attention they received from the medical fraternity affected me profoundly and the example of my father's compassion and concern for these patients intense suffering, could not but inspire me.

Q In your opinion, what is the most essential aspect in treatment of burns?

A When someone suffers severe burns, he or she is essentially in a state of shock, so all

the vital functions of the body need to be monitored and the patients condition has to be stabilised before any major work can be done to heal or repair the wounds. Fluid loss must be prevented and the patient must be protected from any serious infection. This requires aseptic surroundings and use of only sterilised items, including the mattress and bed sheets for the patient. All these conditions would be available in an intensive burns care unit and some hospitals in Bombay do have such units, but not all.

Q What progress or improvements have been made in the treatment of burns in the last few years?

A Nowadays there are many aids for better treatment. The type of equipment required to monitor the patient's vital functions are more sophisticated, better quality dressings are easily available and medication is more effective. However the standard line of treatment remains much the same.

Q Besides skin grafting, is there any other help for healing burn wounds, or of minimising scars?

A Nowadays skin donation is possible and is being advocated. A patients own skin is insufficient when the burns are extensive. In such cases, relatives and friends can help with skin donation. It is a simple procedure to donate skin and the most convenient aspect is that it does not require tissue typing. Anyone can donate skin because the skin essentially

My Doctor • May 2000 Issue

acts as a live dressing while the patient's own body builds up new skin. Using donated skin instead of the patient's own skin reduces the trauma the patient suffers in undergoing repeated surgery to graft skin from one part of the body to another.

Q With the advances in bio-technology, is artificial skin available?

A Production of artificial skin is still in the experimental stage. The costs are prohibitively high and certainly in India, is beyond the means of most victims. It cannot be promoted as a regular line of treatment. Skin donation is a viable and practical alternative and is available at no great cost. Skin can be harvested from cadavers (corpse) and stored for future use, under proper refrigeration.

Q Dr. Keswani, you have been associated with the Burns Association of India for a number of years. Can you tell something about this Association?

A The Burns Association is a body comprising of Doctors, Nurses, Dieticians, Industrialists, Social workers, Burn survivors, fire fighters and others who are concerned about the treatment of victims of burns. It is a body which lays down principles and standards for good burn care in India. It educates workers on how burns are caused and how burns can be prevented and how to get proper care. It looks into the social causes or reasons for the burns and advises industry on adequate measures to prevent fire and how to give first aid.

Q Is there some preventive measure you would like to tell us about?

A Educating people on safety measures is very essential to prevent accidents. I would like to see more schools and colleges take advantage of the programmes we have for teaching children about safety. We also conduct training for factory workers. Their families could also be included in such training so that they are aware how to help a victim in case of an accident.