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Road to recovery not easy for burn victims

United Press International
IOWA CITY, Iowa—For many victims of critical burns, the lengthy recovery process can be just as harrowing as the initial injury.

"A burn injury is probably the worst thing that can happen to you emotionally, physically, financially, psychologically — every way," said Dr. Albert Cram, associate professor of surgery and director of the University Hospitals and Clinics Burn Center, which treats from 140 to 180 burn cases a year.

After victims have overcome the initial shock that accompanies a severe burn, Cram said they must endure considerable pain. This is caused in part by the rigorous procedure necessary to reduce the risk of infection during the process by which undamaged skin is grafted to burn wounds.

Wounds must be cleaned in a hydrotherapy tank and redressed daily and a burn patient generally must undergo debridement — a surgical process to remove dead skin — before skin from unburned

areas of the victim's body can be grafted, Cram said.

Once the skin is clean it will be temporarily covered with strips of pigskin for protection. The pigskin fuses tightly to the body surface and is removed during the grafting operation, Cram said.

"We generally change the dressing once a day. That's when it's most painful for the patients," Cram said. "During that time, we usually give them a narcotic to make them as comfortable as possible."

Cram said his staff has to walk a fine line between helping patients endure pain and preventing them from developing an addiction to the morphine, demerol and other narcotic pain-killers required during the first three weeks following an injury.

Terry Dahl, a physical therapist in the Burn Center, said: "Every one experiences pain to some degree. In order to help patients cope, we use medication, relaxation therapy, music and family support."

Cram said analgesic creams are also applied to wounds to help relieve the pain and lessen patients' reliance on narcotics.

Dietitians also play an important role, he said. For example, a patient with burns covering 60 percent of his body must eat 8,000 calories a day to help the body heal itself, Cram said.

Once new skin has been grafted, the threat of infection is greatly reduced, Cram said. It may take up to two months to complete the grafting process, he said.

When grafts have been completed, patients must be placed in splints to prevent contractions. Additional surgery may be required if the new skin contracts as it heals.

Cram said facial burns, particularly near the eyes, nose and ears, are the most difficult to graft because of "cosmetic problems" at the curvature of the skin.

"We can't make them look like they haven't been burned," Cram said, "but we can make them look better than we could before."

Most critically burned patients must wear a "hockey-like" mask and a pressure suit for a long period during their recovery.

"There are some patients who have trouble getting back to normal," Cram said. "Maybe no one ever fully recovers from a burn injury."

"Patients aged 5 to 34 can survive burns up to 80 percent of their body," Cram said. "Over the age of 60, survival is much lower and a 22 percent body surface burn carries a 50 percent mortality."

Overall, half the patients at the burn unit survive a 72 percent surface burn, Cram said, compared to the 62 percent national average.

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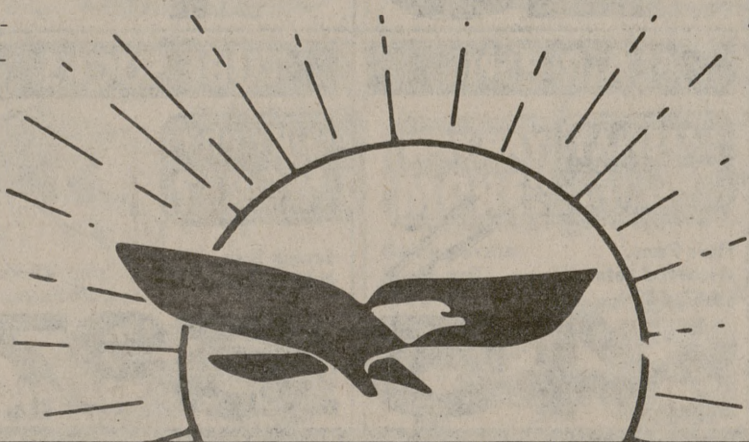
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Merger of insurance firms will be contested

United Press International
LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The state Insurance Department has approved mergers for the state's largest and oldest insurance firms, one to be bought by a Dutch company and another by the Hunt Oil Co. of Dallas.

Stockholders of National Old Line Insurance Co., the state's largest firm, have already filed two suits in federal court to challenge the \$144 million merger with Ennia N.V., a Dutch holding company. The suit says the sale agreement is geared to benefit the heirs of longtime president W.E. Darby and is unfair to 89 percent of the stockholders.

Allan Horne, a department

hearing officer approved the merger, however, and said Monday the prices were "not inequitable."

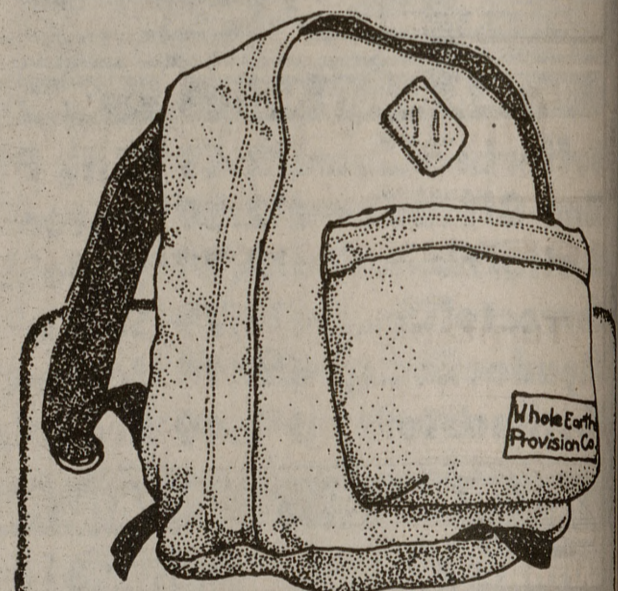
National Old Line's headquarters would remain in Little Rock, and Ennia would use it as a base of expansion into the national insurance market, Ennia officials have said.

Union Life Insurance Co. will also remain in Little Rock after a \$68 million merger with a newly created Hunt company. The merger had been announced in July but the price had not been revealed.

Union Life, Arkansas' oldest domestic insurer, operates in 23 states.

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