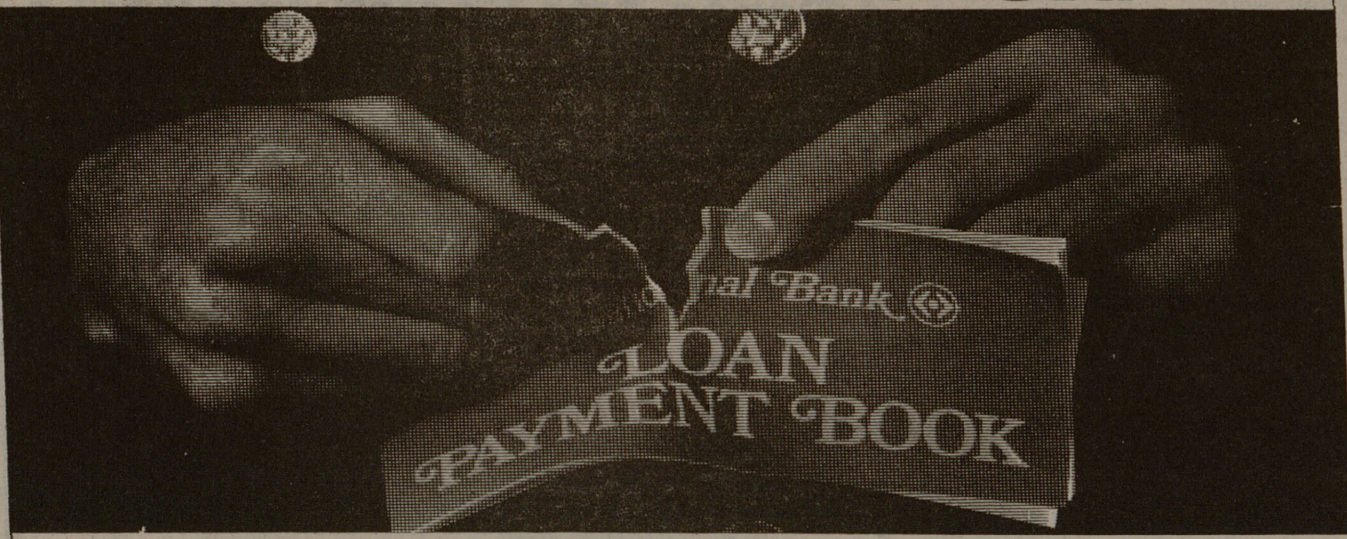


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Burn unit doubled capacity made research advances

DALLAS (AP) — The burn unit at Parkland Memorial Hospital consisted of four four-bed wards in 1962.

It could treat only 100 patients a year, and it lacked staff supervision and much of the equipment necessary for treatment and rehabilitation.

Despite the shortcomings, however, it was a first for Dallas and Dallas County.

Operated by Parkland and the University of Texas Health Science Center's Southwestern Medical School, the center became first in several areas of research and development and patient care over the years.

Dr. Charles Baxter, the center's first director and now its research director, says his staff had no idea the center would grow and become a leader in regional burn-care centers.

"We've come a long way and we have a long way to go," Baxter said. "All we did is take care of whatever came in. You don't try to get larger."

Twenty-five years ago doctors were chartering unknown methods, learning as they went and hoping new techniques would extend the life of someone caught in a fire or burned in an explosion.

Dr. William Curreri, a former University faculty member and now chairman of the University of Southern Alabama department of Surgery said, "I don't think it was unusual 25 years ago for a patient to be brought into a hospital and the curtains drawn around him and he was left to die."

"It was so overwhelming to the hospitals."

At the time, people who suffered burns on 45 percent of their body had only a 50-percent chance of surviving.

Col. Basil Pruitt Jr., commander

and director of the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research at Brooke Army Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston said now, thanks to research at Parkland and other hospitals, the chance for survival is higher.

Pruitt, who addressed a recent 25th anniversary seminar at Parkland, said his staff works closely with the Dallas center.

Baxter said university doctors in the past 25 years developed a fluid resuscitation formula now used in most hospitals; topical antibacterial agents for the control of infections; a

Pam Walter, intensive care nurse said regardless of a patient's stay in the Parkland burn unit averages one day for every 100 days of the body that's burned.

A team of doctors, nurses, workers and occupation therapists work together in an effort to aid the healing of the patients' burns.

"It takes a lot of tender care," said Rebecca Atkins, a head nurse in the burn unit.

"People who work in a burn unit either like burns or they don't," she said. "Those folks who tend to stay. It's definitely a specialty."

Cheri Green, the mother of a 10-month-old Michael Green, burned over 60 percent of his body in a house fire last month. She has seen that love and care in her first hand.

"I think they have done a tremendous job," said Green, whose 2-year-old daughter is in the unit.

"No one expected him to survive as far as he did," she said. "I was pulled through. I don't think it was a better place where we have taken him."

Green said her son also had the benefit of the latest technology during three skin graftations in which doctors used a combination of his skin and artificial skin.

It's possible, she said, that he will be in the intensive care unit for other three months before forms of treatment can be entered.

"They are the best I know," she said. "If only my baby had had a chance. I believe they could have pulled through. Everyone out there has to see this."

"We've come a long way and we have a long way to go. All we did is take care of whatever came in."

— Charles Baxter, research director of the burn center at Parkland Memorial Hospital

way to monitor infections in burn wounds; a nutritional support regimen that prevents weight loss in burn patients, more excision and grafting techniques to reduce scarring, among others.

Today, the hospital has two units with 34 beds that can meet the needs of more than 450 patients a year.

Many are in critical or serious condition with burns covering more than 20 to 25 percent of their bodies.

Fourteen of the beds are strictly for intensive care patients; the rest are in the acute burn unit.

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- Participate on one of five legislative committees (Academic Affairs, External Affairs, Finance, Rules and Regulations, Student Services)
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Call Battalion Classified 845-2611