

Experts Work to Heal Physical and Emotional Scars of Young Burn Patient

“It was less than a split second,” says Nicole Kelsch. “It was that fast, and our whole lives changed.”

Kelsch is referring to the moment when her husband turned to throw something away, and their 14-month-old son, Logan, pulled on a cord connected to a deep fryer, splattering hot oil on his tiny body.

Speeding north on I-15 from American Fork, Nicole was relieved to find out the ambulance was headed to University Hospital. “I knew about the burn center and its reputation as one of the best in the country,” she recalls. In fact, University Hospital’s Burn Center is the only one in the Intermountain West, serving the largest geographical area in the country. The ambulance was met by an emergency burn-unit team that whisked Logan away. That was one of the few times Nicole would be away from her son Logan for the next three weeks.

Fifteen percent of Logan’s body was burned, including his left thigh, right knee, the tops of both his feet, and from his bellybutton around to his left mid-back. “It felt like it was so much on his little body,” says Nicole, who slept in Logan’s room every night. “I just can’t imagine how others survive larger burn areas.” After four days, the doctors unwrapped Logan’s bandages and determined he had third-degree burns that would require skin grafts, a painful surgical procedure that takes healthy skin from donor sites to cover the burn area. “I was so grateful that the nurses watched him like a hawk to keep his pain under control.”

When Logan’s medical team made rounds, Nicole was right in the mix. The interdisciplinary team included the attending physician, a resident physician, nurses, occupational and physical therapists, a nutritionist, case manager, counselor, and pharmacist. “The family is such a key piece in caring for the patient, so we really try to focus on developing trust with them,” explains Brad Wiggins, B.S.N., the Burn Center’s clinical nurse coordinator.

Logan’s personality soon began to reappear. Long lashes fluttered over expressive, blue eyes, replacing his glassy-eyed gaze. “Seeing children who are critically

ill spring back and become playful again is rewarding to the whole staff,” says Wiggins. “We get very attached to our patients.”

Throughout his stay, Logan never left the Burn Center. Anything he needed was brought to him. When his white blood count shot up, his doctor, Jeffrey Saffle, M.D., Burn Center director and professor of surgery, requested that an infectious disease pediatrician come over from Primary Children’s Medical Center. “I’m so grateful these doctors have such great working relationships, and that we were right next to another world-class facility,” Nicole says.

The outpouring of support from not only friends and family, but also the burn unit staffers was overwhelming. Case Manager Gaye Mason quietly let her know that she would deal with the insurance necessities. “Making those phone calls would have been the last thing on my mind,” Nicole says. Nurses checked on her to make sure she was eating and

Nicole Kelsch comforts her son, Logan, recovering from burns on 15 percent of his body. ▶

sleeping and taking care of herself. Crisis Intervention Specialist Kristen Quinn talked her through the emotional steps and guided her in understanding the long-term implications.

“It’s really a deep emotional experience for a burn survivor,” Nicole says, running her hand along the cheek of her now 2½ year-old son. “The scars are forever; he’ll always have questions.” But as he gets older, she will “talk about how the nurses adored him, the incredible care he got, how tough he was, and how he brought so many people together.”

Occasionally, Nicole reflects back on those frightening moments when she thought she might lose Logan. “I’m just so grateful—grateful that the human body is an amazing machine; grateful for modern medicine; grateful for nurses and doctors who are committed and have perfected their skills so they are the best that they can be.”



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—Nicole Kelsch, reflecting on the care her son received at University Hospital’s Burn Center.

UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL'S BURN
Of the 363 patients in 2009, 100 were under 20 years of age.
42 percent of those patients were from outside Utah.