

COVID-19 Disaster Response Assessment

The COVID-19 pandemic over the last several months has dramatically affected the lives of our patients, our families, and our communities in unpredicted ways. Similarly, it has affected the continuum of burn care from supply chain to aftercare. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in burn care from unforeseen threats such as limited personal protective equipment and geographic indiscretion. It also has demonstrated that a burn disaster is not limited to scenarios with large numbers of patients with thermal injuries. We have learned that any disaster that threatens the shared resources of a medical system including staff, supplies, or space can increasingly put pressure on burn care delivery systems leading to implementation of altered standards of care, from contingency to crisis.

Previously, we mitigated the effects of disasters by studying lessons learned from historical civilian and military events. This work led to advancements in preparedness through hazard prevention, technologic innovation in burn assessment or treatment, and scaled strategic plans. However, these same advancements are being significantly challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic not only in the United States, but also across the globe. In response, the American Burn Association's Organization and Delivery of Burn Care Committee has surveyed burn directors and nurse managers weekly during the crisis to gain critical insights directed at improving our capacity and resilience to respond to future disasters. The ABA has hosted weekly international webinars to share a global perspective of the crisis.

What began as a local infectious disease problem rapidly necessitated a total global response. Given its broad skillset, the burn team has served in many locales as an important part of the COVID-19 effort. In the coming months, you should anticipate additional surveys as we gather information to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the burn care community. We ask that you take note of this challenging time in health care and help us by participating in the surveys and sharing your experiences.

In reflection, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on our healthcare system and communities is akin to a severe burn injury. The injury was not anticipated or welcomed and is likely to result in a memorable impact that will shape us differently. The recovery will require care for the wounds as we assess our strengths and weakness in responding to this disaster. Rehabilitation will include pushing ourselves beyond what is comfortable to rebuild what has been compromised during this stressful time. Ultimately, our resilience as a specialty will give us the tools we need to create an enduring future for burn care, that is more capable of withstanding the turbulence of disasters of all types while caring for the people of our communities. Thank you and be well.

William L. Hickerson

*Disaster Subcommittee of the Organization and
Delivery of Burn Care Committee on behalf
of the American Burn Association*

Email: whicker1@uthsc.edu

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e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com.

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