

DECEMBER 2019



SONS OF THE FLAG
Revolutionizing Burn Care

DONATE

BIG VOICE #2

ONE MORE
BURN
SURGEON
IN THE
WORLD



*Audra Clark, M.D.
Surgery*

OUR PURPOSE: In honor of veterans and first responders, we are revolutionizing burn care for ALL Americans. Our vision is to accelerate the process of testing leading technologies and pushing them into circulation for immediate use by burn survivors across the nation.

LEADERSHIP LETTER



Dear Friend,

Happy Holidays to you and yours from Sons of the Flag (SOTF). We thank you for your continued support throughout the year, and **especially for considering to invest one more time before year end.** I can't believe this decade is almost over and 2020 is on the horizon. Do you remember when you were a kid watching movies about the future and wondering what it would be like? The future is here. Yet when it comes to burns we still lag behind on medical advancements to support burn survivors. In last month's *Big Voice*, you learned about Ronald—a young burn survivor with an extraordinary attitude of gratitude. This month, you will meet Dr. Audra Clark and hear about her powerful journey to become one more greatly needed burn surgeon in the world.

Dr. Clark's story reminds me of why I began this organization—to help one person—and the incredible ripple effect investing in one person can have. My own burn experience, plus witnessing the devastating burn traumas of friends, made the urgent support needed in the medical sector extremely apparent. I realized the national and global attention burn care needs. We will never be able to eradicate burns but together we can accelerate the technologies and treatments needed to transform lives. The first step is to support the medical professionals committed to burn care. In 2016, there were 486,000 burn survivors, with one civilian fire injury occurring every minute. But shockingly, there are less than 200 accredited burn surgeons in the US to serve families experiencing this trauma. The revolution of burn care starts with us investing in medical professionals like Dr. Clark, and therefore the survivors and families they serve.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Big Voice*. Much like the "big voice" loudspeakers used to broadcast urgent messages on a military base, our *Big Voice* brings vital news to you. Incredible stories from burn survivors and care providers who embody fearlessness, determination and fortitude. A burn injury lasts a lifetime but the trauma doesn't have to. **Your contributions to our critical programming will transform lives. Please donate now.**

With a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan".

Ryan "Birdman" Parrott
Founder & CEO

STARS & STRIPES

We are so grateful for your support of our 2019 Stars and Stripes Luncheon and Red Carpet Event. Thank you for joining forces with us to help actualize our mission of revolutionizing burn care and quality of life for burn survivors and their families.

Thank you to our wonderful chairs Libby and David Hunt, Lissie and Wayne McCullough, and our honorary chairs, Nancy and Herbert Hunt; your dedication to selfless service is unrivaled.

Your generous financial support this year helped us achieve the following:

- Signed a multi-year commitment for burn fellowships with UT Southwestern
- Significantly enhanced our endowment with Parkland Hospital's Burn Unit
- Fulfilled capital funding for necessary equipment at Parkland Hospital's Burn Unit
- Funded countless burn survivor requests for assistance

ONE MORE BURN SURGEON IN THE WORLD

Despite the extent of burn injuries and great need for burn care in the US, there are less than 200 accredited burn surgeons across the country. This statistic is no surprise to Dr. Audra Clark, a fifth-year surgery resident at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Having completed extensive rotations in the burn center, Dr. Clark can speak insightfully to some of the reasons for this shortage. "Firstly, across the country there are surgical residents who are never even exposed to burn surgery training. If you're at a residency that doesn't have a burn center, you may never see it or get to know that you might be interested in it. So, Sons of the Flag funding medical and research fellowships really opens up the chance for more people to be exposed to the opportunity. I think another reason is that it's extremely emotionally and physically demanding as a specialty. You have patients critically ill in the hospital for months at a time, and there's a lot of family support and patient support that needs to happen because these injuries can be devastating. You have

such an intimate and intense connection with your patient, which is something I love but not all people are drawn to." She recalls a previous patient, a badly burned 14-year-old girl. "I became close with her over her time in the burn unit, I was able to be with her while she was in ICU, then all the way through rehab.

demands peculiar to burn surgery. "Burn patients have lost their skin barrier which is what, in other patients who go into surgery, can help keep them warm and their temperature regulated. So because burn patients can get cold very easily we keep the operating room at about 95°F. Then

"I feel so supported by Sons of the Flag; that they have invested these incredible resources in me—in my future—makes me feel humbled and also responsible."

Now they send me a picture every year on her first day of school. She's doing great, she's now 18 and about to go off to college. To be able to save people and get them through to relative normalcy, then to see them thriving in life, is an incredible privilege."

Dr. Clark also notes the physical

we put on our gowns, we're under hot lights, it's physically exhausting doing that for seven hours a day."

After her third clinical year, Dr. Clark pursued a two-year research fellowship focused exclusively on burn research. Her fellowship was fully funded by Sons of the Flag. (continued over page)



ABOVE LEFT: Dr. Clark operating at Parkland Burn Center. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dr. Clark and her husband Raymond at the 2019 Sons of the Flag "Stars and Stripes" Red Carpet Event

(continued from previous) Dr. Clark's major projects included studying burn-related acute kidney injury, as well as looking at muscle regeneration after a burn injury. "Because of the extreme inflammatory response that happens after a burn, burn patients can lose up to 30-40% of their lean muscle mass, which is extremely debilitating. So that was a really big area of research nationally because all over the country we're trying to figure out if there's a way we can help with cell regeneration, and also possibly slow the cell death in order to minimize the muscle loss that burn patients experience, which would be very helpful during their recovery." Dr. Clark's projects resulted in over 15 publications in medical journals, with her findings disseminated to burn care specialists around the world.

Dr. Clark witnessed Sons of the Flag's work with the burn community firsthand, prior to connecting with them regarding her research fellowship. "I'd heard of Sons of the Flag from burn patients, and I'd seen them come into the hospital and support patients. They also do wonderful things like bring snacks for our staff to help keep our morale up because it's so emotionally

taxing on everyone involved in taking care of these patients. Then I was officially introduced through Dr. Steven Wolf, he'd been working with Sons of the Flag so he made the connection for us when he knew I had an interest in doing burn research. It was very fortuitous."

Dr. Clark cannot overemphasize the importance of pursuing research, and the value of research discoveries and breakthroughs for the global medical community. "The way we currently care for burn patients is very different to how we cared for burn patients 30 years ago; we're getting so much better at it because of research that's been done in the past. My hope is that we keep moving forward with research and all share our results so that we can keep getting better at taking care of our patients." It was during her research fellowship that Dr. Clark decided to pursue burn surgery as her specialty. She begins a burn surgery fellowship next year, and hopes to stay on as a burn surgery attending afterwards.

Dr. Clark reflects on the significance of having Sons of the Flag invest in her, thereby nurturing and elevating

her ability to positively impact burn survivors in her community, as well as the progress of burn care around the world. "It means everything. The fact that I feel so supported by Sons of the Flag; that they have invested these incredible resources in me—in my future—makes me feel humbled and also responsible. I want to pay that forward as much as I can. I don't take it lightly or take it for granted that I have people who have supported and backed me to get me here. The way to "repay" Sons of the Flag is to pay it forward to all of these burn patients. I'm happy to know that Sons of the Flag is in the world providing all of this extra support and care for burn patients. We do all of the medical stuff and provide the emotional support that we can while they're in the hospital, but to know that there's an organization like Sons of the Flag helping patients during *and after*, and filling gaps that the medical system can't provide patients, is incredible. I hope to stay involved with Sons of the Flag for a long time because I think they are really doing phenomenal work. In my case, they have absolutely created one more burn surgeon in the world."

OUR IMPACT

Here is the impact your crucial support has made for the burn community over the past five years. Thank you for ensuring SOTF is able to meet the immense need for holistic burn care and support, medical research and developments, vastly improved quality of life, and ultimately, hope.

**Committed
over \$450K**

towards financially
empowering over 130 burn
survivors and their families



Committed \$1M
for burn fellowships

Raised \$50K
to support 14 pediatric
burn camps nationwide

