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# A Different Degree of Care

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Welcome to the Burn Unit! We are a verified Level 1 Pediatric and Adult Burn Center by the American College of Surgeons and American Burn Association. The unit consists of 8 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds, 10 Med/Surg beds and an outpatient clinic. We can provide care that operates 24/7, since burns (like many hospitalizations) happen beyond business hours. The unit is equipped with a hydrotherapy tank room (photo 1) specifically for wound care, a playroom (photo 2), and a pediatric sedation room.

The UC San Diego Health Burn Center is the one and only burn center in San Diego and Imperial County. Our unit routinely admits pediatric patients, who surprisingly are not always admitted for burn injuries. FunFF fact, some of these non-burn admissions are for digit injuries requiring re-implantation and leech therapy. Our unit is the only inpatient unit in which you might encounter caring for an infant and 90-year-old on the same shift.

The American Burn Association recognizes the importance of additional psychosocial support. This support is provided by our multidisciplinary team of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and child life specialists. It is a team effort in caring for these patients, and we are appreciative of the expertise and individualized care each discipline brings to them.

Being in the unique position of caring for pediatric patients in a largely adult centered health system called for the creation of the Child Life Program. This team of four Certified Child Life Specialists at the Burn Center are

graduate level, trauma informed, child development specialists. The program was developed and implemented in 2009 when the Burn Center became verified by the American Burn Association. Since then, we have grown to support our pediatric burn patients and the children of the adult burn patients. Child Life Specialists assist in all aspects of care including accompanying children to dressing changes and procedures in both inpatient and outpatient settings, providing emotional support at the bedside, preparing children for surgery, supporting families through bereavements, and accompanying young burn survivors as they return to school. Additionally, the Burn Center is home to the pediatric playroom which provides our patients with a safe space and the opportunity to be a kid without any worry that medications or procedures will interrupt their play. Allowing children this safe, protected time and space is critical for continued healthy development. \*

Whenever people hear that we work in the Burn Center, the reaction

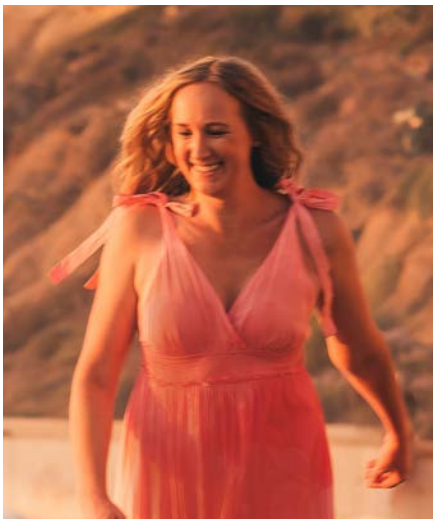
is always the same. Face of utter revulsion, mouth agape and some sort of comment about how unbearably hard the job must be. And they're partly right. Our jobs require us to have an inhumane detachment in one breath while being able to fully support in a calming tone in the next.

We routinely complete abnormal tasks to bring back normalcy to someone's life. We often cause pain to promote healing. I wish I could tell you that hearing patients scream in pain gets easier over time, but it doesn't. Or that seeing a child in pain becomes normal, but it doesn't. Your soul (thankfully) doesn't magically get callused as the years pass. You learn to be a breathing coach and help patients through these agonizing dressing changes. You learn that "fixing" isn't always what these patients need, but just someone to listen and hear them. And you learn that not everyone fiercely protects children the way they should be.

So why do so many of us stay for so long? Easy. It's that 95% burn kid that no one else thought would make it but



**Katie Hamelin LMFT, RPT-S, CCLS** started the child life program at Burn Center in 2009. Her background includes a bachelor's degree in social work, master's degree in psychology and she is currently working to complete her Ph.D. in Counseling with an emphasis on trauma and crisis work. She is a Certified Child Life Specialist, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Registered Play Therapist Supervisor. She has a passion for trauma prevention, grief support, and training child life graduate students at the burn center.



**Megan Zynkian MSL, BSN, RN, CCRN** started as a new graduate RN in the Burn ICU in 2011. She has a passion for caring for the unit's pediatric population, which created a quick bond between her and the child life team. She has gone on to become the unit educator and loves teaching others about burns.

you knew in the back of your mind he was a fighter and when he comes back to visit the unit, he practically tackles you to the ground with a giant bear hug. It's the patient who was so afraid of what their scars would look like, who now wears tank tops and proudly shares her story with others. It's the small moments. Taking a patient outside to feel fresh air on their skin for the first time in months. Sitting on the lawn blowing bubbles with a 4-year-old whose mom cannot be with him while he heals because she has an infant at home. It's the relationships you build with these patients, who become family. And it's the coworkers that laugh with you, cry with you and know without question will always have your back. I love the community that comes with building up these patients whose lives were turned upside down in an instant.



Photo 1: The tank room is where our patients are taken to receive what we call hydrotherapy which is administered by our hydrotherapy technician Michelle Quinones (Pictured below). Hydrotherapy is important to help thoroughly clean wounds and help aid in the healing process.

Photo 2: The playroom on the burn unit is run by our Child life team. This space is more than just a room, it is a safe space for kids to act like kids, participate in medical play before an upcoming procedure and bring some normalcy to their hospitalization. The playroom is staffed daily, allowing for children to visit regularly.

