



Shriners NEWS & NOTES

Burn Patient Attends School After Severe Burn Injury

(NAPSA)—Like every kid, Bethany is excited about her first day of school, yet she is concerned about fitting in. The challenge for this girl is different, because Bethany is a burn injury survivor. She will go to school knowing that no one else will look like her.

Will she have friends? Will she be stared at or made fun of? These are the questions of every child whose body is visibly changed from a burn injury. To protect a child from further pain, parents may understandably want to keep their child at home. Yet, isolating a child because they look different can cause even greater harm to their well being; there are misconceptions and fears that can be cleared through education and communication.

To help patients' transition from the hospital to the classroom, the Galveston Shriners Hospital burn facility provides a re-entry program. When a patient is ready to go to school, a hospital team will go to the school ahead of the child, bring a video of the child, along with any special equipment the child must wear and will go to every classroom to introduce the child. They will show the video, discuss differences, and answer any questions the students and staff may have. Later that day, when the team has completed its presentations, the child will return to a school that is prepared to welcome them.

Six-year-old Bethany is a patient at the Galveston Burn Hospital, and with the help of the Shriners staff, Bethany was ready to start first grade earlier this school year. The hospital team travels to Bethany's new classroom. "We came to visit you on an airplane from Texas because a friend of ours is coming to your school today," Bonnie Bishop, child life specialist, announces. Coos of excitement echo throughout the room.

Speaking in first-grade language, the team talks about the special place they work that takes care of children who have been accidentally burned. Bishop talks about Bethany's differences and asks the students what they think and how they feel.

"What happens when you fall down and scrape your skin?"



Shriners' re-entry program helps ease burn patients' transition back to the classroom.

Bishop asks her audience. "Your skin falls off." "It bleeds." "It scars." "It's red," the kids respond. Bishop says, "A lot of Bethany's body was hurt like that and so a lot of her skin looks different."

The discussion turns to Bethany's hand that has three fingers. "When Bethany was burned, they had to take two fingers off in an operation so she wouldn't get sicker," Bishop explains, "But she can write and color and play ball just like you all can."

The tissue expander beneath Bethany's chin is discussed next. "It looks like Bethany swallowed a ball," exclaims one student. "Yes, it does look like that, but she didn't," says a hospital team member. She explains what the tissue expander is, how it works and why Bethany has one.

Bishop then explains that she is now going to introduce Bethany to them on a videotape and talks about the things they will see. "We talked about how Bethany wears a wig because she does not have hair. Well, sometimes when Bethany gets hot she may take her wig off. You will get to see Bethany do this on the video."

The lights are lowered and every eye is glued to the screen. At one part, Bethany takes her wig off and puts on her bandanna. On the video, Bishop is explaining how Bethany has a choice; she can wear her wig or her bandanna at

school.

After the video, students are again encouraged to express their thoughts. It is repeated that while Bethany looks different on the outside, she is the same on the inside and can do most anything the other kids can do. The students chatter and their comfort level is apparent. "So, are you all ready to meet her?" A unanimous "Yes!" is shouted across the room.

The scene was repeated for every student and staff member. Constantly affirming the students' observations and questions, the hospital team guided, provided understanding and affirmed their ability to respond appropriately.

When Bethany enters the classroom, every student gets out of their desk and comes forward to greet her. Their little bodies combine to enfold Bethany in a warm hug. Greetings are exchanged and then Bethany and her classmates chatter and compare school supplies.

The hospital team says goodbye as the bell rings to dismiss school. A conversation is overheard in the hallway. "There she is," says one student. "Her name is Bethany," responds another. A hospital employee turns to the student and says, "Oh, are you a friend of Bethany's?" "Yes," the student proudly proclaims.

Burn injured kids are normal kids who have extraordinary challenges. They will face and conquer physical challenges that would frighten the strongest adult. As Bishop always tells the students, "We can look different on the outside, but we have the same feelings on the inside."

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.