

THE SCAR FREE FOUNDATION

PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE SANDHU CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

OCTOBER 2018

Introduction

In December 2017, The Sandhu Charitable Foundation kindly donated £20,000 to The Scar Free Foundation. Since then we have continued to make clear progress towards our mission to achieve scar free healing within a generation. This report briefly outlines some of the activities of the charity that your generosity has helped to support.

The problem of scarring

After surviving trauma, disease or other life-threatening injuries, patients can be left with severe scarring. These scars can be painful, complex and traumatic. They can restrict movement and be the cause of ongoing physical and psychological pain. Scarring under the skin, called fibrosis, is responsible for serious chronic diseases which affect major organs. Scarring of the kidney, for example, is the principle cause of kidney disease and affects 1.8 million adults in the UK. Scarring of the heart following surgery or heart attacks is a known contributor to sudden cardiac arrest. Despite this, treatments for scarring continue to fall far behind treatments for other medical conditions. We owe it to the millions of people, whose lives have been negatively affected by scarring, to change this.

Recent activity

We have recently appointed Professor Peter Weissberg CBE, former Medical Director of the British Heart Foundation, as Chairman of our Research Council. Professor Weissberg's experience managing a multi-million-pound programme of research has been invaluable in helping us implement our Scar Free Strategy. Lord James Bethell, recently elected to the House of Lords, has also taken on the chairmanship of our Development Board, driving our fundraising activity. He brings his wealth of knowledge across government, media and industry to lead our £24 million fundraising campaign.

This year has seen a significant step up in our research activity, with projects underway which will set the groundwork for future scar free treatments. This includes working with the University of Bristol to form a burns cohort to track thousands of children who have survived scald injuries.

A major hub for our research is The Scar Free Foundation Centre for Conflict Wound Research, principally funded through a grant from HM Treasury from LIBOR funds. The Centre, which opened this September at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital, will investigate how the body heals itself following gunshot, burn and blast injuries sustained in conflict and terrorist attacks. We are also in early discussions with Imperial College London about opening a new scientific and bioengineering centre, based at their planned White City Campus. The Centre will bring together world-leading scientists and engineers to direct long-term research into the biological and cellular processes behind scarring.

The UK Burns Research Network

The UK Burns Research Network is a collaborative and patient focused programme led by world leading burns experts. It will spearhead the development, testing and delivery of future anti-scarring therapies for patients who have sustained serious burn injuries. One of the biggest initiatives that the UK Burns Research Network will direct is a two-year feasibility study for the world's first children's burns cohort. This project will collect DNA and family histories from thousands of children who have survived hot drink scalds to understand the biological mechanisms behind scarring. The project will also track the long-term psychological, social and health issues that these children face, so that we can develop treatments to mitigate these challenges. This

study builds on our partnership with the University of Bristol, who lead The Scar Free Foundation Cleft Gene Bank & Cohort Study, which has over 2,000 families recruited to it.

The UK Burns Research Network is also developing a “gold-standard,” universally agreed, Objective Scar Assessment Tool. Currently, scars are measured and assessed by questionnaires. The results obtained are extremely hard to quantify and vary from one setting to another. By measuring scar colour, pliability, depth and density, the Scar Assessment Tool will create a single, combined score that can be quantified. From this, we can begin to establish and rank what constitutes a “good” scar outcome. An Objective Scar Assessment Tool is vital for identifying the most effective treatments for reducing scarring, from treatments like pressure garments that are currently part of routine care for treating serious burns to new technologies like the anti-scarring dressing in development through our Centre for Conflict Wound Research.

The Scar Free Foundation Centre for Conflict Wound Research

The £4.5 million Scar Free Foundation Centre for Conflict Wound Research, based at Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital, was opened this month by our Royal Patron HRH The Countess of Wessex. The Centre focuses on how the body heals itself following conflict related trauma. It is unique in bringing together uniformed and civilian scientists to develop new treatments, from the point of injury to rehabilitation. One of the flagship programmes supported by the Centre is the “first-in-man” clinical trial of a new anti-scarring gel dressing. The dressing is loaded with Decorin, a protein found in the body which acts as a first defence mechanism against scarring. It is the first of its kind to actively prevent scar formation.

Alongside this, the Centre will also conduct a long-term rehabilitative project which seeks to address the support needs of Armed Forces veterans who have sustained appearance altering injuries in combat. Currently, support materials for this population are non-existent. Although some wounded veterans manage well, others struggle to adjust to living with visible difference, both physically and psychologically. In response to this, the psychosocial project will create bespoke support materials specifically tailored to this population. We will recruit members from the CASEVAC Club, made up of wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, to help design and trial these treatments.

Our Ambassadors

Our Scar Free Ambassadors, people with lived experience of scarring, are our most powerful resource. We involve Scar Free Ambassadors, along with their parents, partners and family members, throughout our research. Their voices and experience are the driving force behind our research ambitions and are an invaluable asset in highlighting why our scar free mission is so important.

Our first annual Involvement Reception was hosted at the Ministry of Defence in the spring to bring Ambassadors together and to keep them updated and informed about our research. To strengthen this sense of community, we also worked with one of our lead funders the VTCT Foundation to form the Appearance Collective. The Appearance Collective joins up and supports other charities working within the visible difference field. It is only through a collaborative approach that we will be able to achieve our scar free mission.

Conclusion

This year has seen a significant step up in our research activity as we start to deliver our scar free strategy. Our exciting new developments underway are all courtesy of donors like the Sandhu Charitable Foundation. Your support has meant that we can continue to lead our pioneering scar free research, so that one day, a world without scarring will become a reality. We would like to thank you, once again, for helping to make this possible.