Postburn Outcomes Found to Be Worse in Regular Smokers

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CHICAGO — Burn victims who are regular smokers prior to their injuries have poorer outcomes than do nonsmokers, data presented at the annual meeting of the American Burn Association suggest.

In a retrospective analysis of 240 patients, smokers had significantly more surgical procedures than did nonsmokers (1.3 vs. 0.8) and significantly longer hospital stays (13 vs. 9.5 days).

Additionally, smokers had an 85% increased risk of infection during inpatient treatment, said lead investigator Neil Doran, Ph.D., of the University of California, San Diego. The infection rate was 51% in smokers and 36% in nonsmokers, a significant difference.

The study included 80 patients, mean age 35 years, who were admitted to the burn unit within the first 48 hours of their burn injury. An additional 160 nonsmokers, mean age 37 years. The total body surface area burned was similar between smokers (average 7%, range 0.5%-35%) and nonsmokers (average 6%, range 0.3%-36%). The source of burns was flame in roughly 50% of cases, scalpel in 20%, contact burns in 10%, and chemical, tar, steam, and sunburns in the remainder.

Impaired wound healing, defined as skin graft failure, was not significantly different between smokers and nonsmokers (10% vs. 3%). Dr. Doran said. Impaired wound healing likely was not statistically different between groups because of the relatively few graft failures in either group.

Impaired wound healing is measured by subjective impressions and wound size, the clinical way was the better way, Dr. Eri-...