

Rhode Island Hospital Breakthroughs

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2021

From Surviving to Thriving, with Care from the Rhode Island Burn Center

It was a beautiful evening in June of 2018, and Paul O'Brien and his wife, Tracie, were hosting a party at their Norton, Massachusetts, home to celebrate their daughter's high school graduation.

Quickly, things went horribly wrong. As he was bringing over wood to the fire pit in his backyard, Paul, then 52, tripped and fell into the fire's flames.

"I knocked myself out and when I woke up, I was engulfed in flames and burning alive, and I couldn't get myself out," Paul says. "It was kind of a blur."

Disoriented and with his foot stuck in the pit, he struggled to free himself. Making matters worse, everyone else at the party was then in the front yard, while he was in the back. Finally, "by the grace of God," Paul's brother-in-law heard his screams and raced over to pull him out of the fire.

The first responders on the scene immediately transported Paul to Rhode Island Hospital, the region's only Level 1 Trauma Center.

Paul suffered third-degree burns to his right arm and the right side of his back and ear, and second-degree burns to the right side of his face. Overall, more than 20 percent of his body was burned, and he was in tremendous pain.

"It was to the point where my skin was melting off my body ... my face, my ear, my back," he says.

After Paul was stabilized in the emergency room, he was transferred to the Trauma Intensive Care Unit (TICU),



Paul O'Brien

where his care was overseen by doctors, nurses, and occupational and physical therapists from Rhode Island Hospital's Burn Center, the only accredited burn center in the state.

He spent six weeks in the hospital; the first three of which were in the TICU. His treatment included pain management, wound care and irrigation, and infection prevention measures, including burn showers to remove dead tissue (debridement).

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Paul underwent five surgeries at Rhode Island Hospital, overseen by David Harrington, MD, director of the Rhode Island Burn Center. For the first one, immediately after the accident, Dr. Harrington grafted cadaver and pig skin onto his body to help it heal. A week later, Dr. Harrington took skin from his right leg and grafted it onto his arm and back area to save his burned arm from needing to be amputated.

After leaving the hospital, Paul spent months rehabilitating at home. He was out of work from his position in finance at a marketing firm for seven months and, throughout, continued receiving treatment at Rhode Island Hospital.

Paul says he received above-and-beyond care throughout his healing process. For example, Casey O'Rourke, program manager at the Rhode Island Burn Center, made trips to his home to deliver bandages and advise his visiting nurses on how to best care for his wounds.

Eight months after the accident, he was still struggling with mobility in his arm, describing it as "frozen in place." This led to another surgery, a scar tissue revision procedure known as a Z-plasty.

"It was like a miracle because it allowed me to actually use my arm again," he says. "I was able to take my arm and actually move it to a normal position where I could brush my teeth and comb my hair."

The staff at the Rhode Island Burn Center view patients' recovery in a long-term and holistic way, Casey O'Rourke says.

"We ask, how did this burn influence all these different aspects of their life, and the goal is to get them back to 100 percent," she says.

Today, Paul is doing well and anticipates having one final surgery to repair a wound on his elbow. He's even starting to revisit some of his old hobbies, including drumming in a cover band.

"I'm here today because of the great care, competence and kindness of the people at Rhode Island Hospital," Paul says. "I can't say enough about them."

FIRE PIT SAFETY TIPS



The Rhode Island Burn Center often treats patients who have been injured as a result of a fire pit accident. Here are some tips to stay safe the next time you're gathered around a backyard fire.

 Never leave children unattended.	 Never use a fire pit on a wooden deck.
 Never leave pets unattended.	 Start and stay with a small fire.
 Build fire in an open area with no overhanging branches.	 Use a wire mesh to control sparks.
 Never leave a fire unattended.	 Keep a hose, fire extinguisher and bucket of sand close by.
 Use a recommended fire starter, NOT an accelerant or gasoline.	 Keep in mind that fire pits can smolder and remain hot for up to 24 hours even when covered with sand.

Get to Know Rhode Island Hospital's New President

On February 1, Saul N. Weingart, MD, joined Lifespan as the president of Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's Hospital. A former primary care physician, Dr. Weingart previously served as chief medical officer and senior vice president of medical affairs for Tufts Medical Center and Tufts Children's Hospital in Boston. He shared some personal information and insights in a recent interview.

Family: His wife, Sindy, sons Ben, recently graduated from Northeastern, and Jonah, a sophomore at the University of Michigan—and a Tibetan terrier named Nick.

Hobbies: Watching Netflix with his sons and practicing Shotokan karate. He recently earned his third-degree black belt.

Research interest: Understanding the role of patient engagement in improving health care safety and quality.

His start in medicine: "I went to medical school in my 30s, to my wife's chagrin, looking for a career that offered the opportunity to make a direct and immediate impact. The longitudinal relationships you build with patients over many years are very gratifying. It's been great—and I haven't looked back."

First impressions of Rhode Island Hospital: "There is an incredible commitment to care here. People like each other, love their patients, and like the work, which means we are all focused on the purpose. Academic medical centers such as Rhode Island Hospital are the greatest—they provide cutting edge care, serve the community and are a safety net, all while being an incubator for the next generation of physicians."



Saul N. Weingart, MD

Help Others Through the Alzheimer's Registry

Did you know? One of the biggest roadblocks to developing effective prevention strategies for Alzheimer's Disease is identifying volunteers to participate in current and planned studies.

By joining the Alzheimer's Disease Prevention Registry, members will be alerted to new research opportunities for which they may qualify, receive educational news and information through our newsletter, and have annual memory testing by phone.

To qualify, volunteers must speak English and be at least 50 years of age. People with currently normal memory or those with mild memory loss are encouraged to participate, with eligibility to be determined by an initial

memory screening. Those who already have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or dementia are excluded.

Currently, there are a variety of ongoing studies, as well as numerous studies planned for the future. Participants should be aware that certain studies involve minimal interaction—only requiring single visits spread out over time, while other studies will require treatment with medications and/or behavioral programs.

By volunteering for clinical research, you are contributing to an effort that could potentially improve the lives of millions of people. For more information or to sign up, call 401-444-0085, email memory@lifespan.org, or go to lifespan.org/centers-services/alzheimers-disease-memory-disorders-center.



Donors Support Respite Room for Employees

Stress, loss, anxiety, grief, isolation. The mental health effects of living—and working—during the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant. In fact, many experts describe such challenges as a “second pandemic.”

Thanks to the generosity of several donors, Rhode Island Hospital employees, including those working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been able to escape into a tranquil oasis during breaktime.

The hospital’s respite room—open on the second floor of the Potter Building since April 2020 and maintained by Volunteer Services—is outfitted with a massage chair donated by Ocean State Job Lot and plants donated by Jordan’s Jungle in Pawtucket and Home Depot in Cranston.

Staff can listen to guided meditations on tablets donated by the Sufi Psychology Association and pick up a healthful snack, courtesy of Providence-based distributor United Natural Foods. Colorful artwork made by children attending public schools in North Kingstown also decorates the space.

“It’s so nice for employees to have a respectful, quiet area to relax,” said Fernanda Chaves, a supervisor in Environmental Services.



Respite Room



Philanthropy is essential to sustaining every successful academic medical center. It is because of the generosity and kindness of its supporters that Rhode Island Hospital continues to thrive and grow while meeting the needs of our community since 1863. The 1863 Society celebrates donors who have made an annual commitment of \$250 or more to our hospital’s Fund for Excellence.

To learn more about The 1863 Society, including giving levels and benefits, please visit lifespan.org/1863-society.

Breakthroughs, a publication of the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation, is published for the friends and supporters of Rhode Island Hospital. For more information, please contact the Development Office at 401-444-6758.

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