

## How the Wound Healing Society began

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The history of an innovation and its implementation often involves several individuals with similar ideas at similar times. So was the birth of the Wound Healing Society. Many factors drove the formation of our Society, including the founders, major changes in our scientific knowledge, and changing concepts of industry in the market for wound healing products. The time had come, and so it was only natural that the thought of forming a Wound Healing Society was more than a fleeting idea in the minds of many wound healing investigators. Therefore, credit for the birth of the Society belongs to many.

In the early 1950s and into the late 1970s, only a handful of clinicians and basic scientists were interested in the field. They included Stanley Levenson, J. Engelbert Dunphy, Erle E. Peacock Jr., John Schilling, Jerry Gross, David Jackson, Bengt Zederfeldt, and Thomas Gibson. Names such as Artz, Moncrief, Charlie Baxter, and Basil Pruitt revolutionized the care of burn wounds. The next generation saw the likes of Tom Hunt, George Martin, Russell Ross, and Karl Piez, while the wound healing careers of Kel Cohen, Bob Diegelmann, Paul Ehrlich, Bill Eaglstein, Mike Caldwell, Adrian Barbul, and Marty Robson matured in the 1970s. Great support in these early days came from industry with thoughtful pioneers such as David Marshall, Walton Van Winkle, and Carlos Blanco. In addition, the National Institute of General Medical Sciences played a role, with vigorous support from Emily Black and

Lee Van Lentin. There are many great leaders who followed and made the Society the success it is today, who of course did not participate in its creation. Those who carried the torch all have our deepest respect and admiration. Similar to every article that lists names, we apologize in advance for those omitted inadvertently.

Each decade had shown new interest and excitement among clinicians—especially surgeons and dermatologists, and an increasing number of basic scientists. In the early days, there was a clear gap between basic scientists and clinicians. To learn the basics essential for understanding the processes of tissue repair, many clinicians attended the Gordon Research Conference on collagen. In the early 1970s, collagen was king when it came to wound healing. We thought scarring and nonhealing wound problems would be solved simply by controlling collagen metabolism. Our scientific tools were primitive by today's standards and perhaps our thought processes were the same! The first wound healing text to become a classic was published in 1970 by Peacock and van Winkle.<sup>1</sup> It remains a classic to this day.

There were no conferences on wound healing per se until the Dunphy/Hunt meeting in February 1968, which was later published and served as a major source of wound healing information for young investigators.<sup>2</sup> This collection of papers, along with the Peacock and van Winkle text, gave many of us our first real understanding of contraction, collagen metabolism, inflammation, and a host of wound healing phenomena. In 1971, the late John Longacre assembled a stellar group of clinicians and basic scientists in Cincinnati, Ohio, and produced a monograph entitled *The Ultrastructure of Collagen*, which remains of value to this very day.<sup>3</sup> In April 1974 there was an *International Symposium on Wound Healing* in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, with key addresses by Russell Ross, David Jackson, Albert Dorfman, and Mel Glimscher. During the 1980s, Tom Hunt, Eli Pines of Johnson and Johnson, Adrian Barbul, and Mike Caldwell were able to put together three *International Symposium on Wound Healing* meetings in Tarpon Springs, Florida.<sup>4-6</sup>

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Several factors led to an almost logarithmic increase in interest in wound healing, and hence the formation of the Wound Healing Society. Of importance, industry became interested in wound healing due to advances in dressings and understanding of growth factors and cytokines. In the early 1970s, industry began to recognize that there were many chronic wounds for which treatments were largely nonexistent. Education of caregivers was also suboptimal. It was easy to see a potential market in this unexplored area. Moreover, the longevity of the population was increasing and the potential market was expected to grow. With little science, but with savvy marketing skills, the 1970s saw the development of several new dressings that claimed to enhance wound healing. Winter's work showing that a moist environment enhanced the healing of partial-thickness wounds by enhancing epithelialization became the battle cry of wound healing marketers for all wounds, be they partial- or full-thickness wounds.<sup>7</sup> From that point up to this day, despite great effort, many useful means of coping with wounds have been developed but there has been little substantive change.

Shortly after Stanley Cohen and Rita Montaldi disclosed the presence of cytokines and isolated epidermal growth factor,<sup>8</sup> it became apparent that these mediators might enhance tissue repair. By the time of the Hunt et al. meetings in Florida during the 1980s, industrial research and development attendees were beginning to ascertain what opportunities might be gleaned from this information. Even Food and Drug Administration (FDA) attendees were wondering about cytokines and what wound treatments needed to be regulated and in what manner. At that time Tom Hunt and Kel Cohen decided to set up a meeting with the FDA simply to educate them on the essentials of wound healing and wound care. We wanted to show the FDA ways to consider the evaluation of new wound healing agents that we felt would come before them for approval within the next decade. Two visits to the FDA were made, and we found a lack of knowledge, very set ideas, and a reluctance to consider new approaches. How refreshing it is to see the changes that have evolved in dealing with the FDA, probably due to Wound Healing Society interaction with its members.

Industry continues to move ahead with the cytokine/growth factor issue including substances that elicit their production. However, interest has widened to include gene therapy, control of matrix metalloproteinases, and physiologic enhancers such as hyperbaric oxygen.

In 1987, Kel Cohen suggested to colleagues in the Wound Healing Laboratory at the Medical College of Virginia that the time was ripe for establishing some sort of organization for the formal exchange of ideas and research support for wound healing. The original document descri-

bing this organization was put together by the chief technician of the laboratory (Barbara McCoy) as a Foundation, rather than a Society, where industry would be asked to contribute funds for scholarships to promote young investigators interested in developing careers related to wound healing. Yearly meetings would be held for the exchange of ideas. Because there was a sudden burst of information and numerous companies were looking to retain consultants, Kel Cohen thought each major consultant would contribute a portion of their consulting fee to the Foundation for scholarship funds. This never materialized.

About 6 months later, at a Marion Laboratory-sponsored meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, there was an impressive assembly of experts in the wound healing field. During a free period, Kel Cohen brought up the idea of a wound healing foundation and the contribution of consulting fees to the foundation. Several other individuals, including Tom Hunt, Charlie Baxter, Adrian Barbul, and Paul Ehrlich indicated they had similar thoughts and were enthusiastic about the idea. Kel Cohen agreed to organize the concept and to invite a number of investigators to develop the fledgling organization, while Tom Hunt agreed to set up a meeting site. A letter was then mailed to numerous interested people to a meeting in Bethesda, Maryland, at the Uniformed Services Medical School on April 29, 1988, to organize the *American Wound Healing Foundation* (Figure 1). Our gracious host was Norman Rich, chairman of the department of surgery at the medical school.

Attendees to the meeting included Tom Hunt, Kel Cohen, Bob Diegelmann, Adrian Barbul, Mike Caldwell, Paul Ehrlich, George Martin, and Tony Sank. Although it was agreed that yearly meetings should be held, there was considerable debate about the substance, organization, and goals of the foundation/society. However, there was a great deal of enthusiasm, and we agreed to keep the momentum going with a second meeting at the same location on June 28, 1988. At that time, Wendell Craine, former executive at Baxter Laboratories, was invited by Kel Cohen to give an industrial perspective for such an organization and business guidance on setting up the new entity. There was extensive debate as to qualifications for membership, and it was resolved that full membership would require a terminal degree, either an MD or its equivalent or a PhD. Nurses and paraprofessionals would be associate members.

A third meeting was held in Dallas, Texas, at a subsequent Marion-sponsored wound healing symposium. On an invitation from Charlie Baxter, the founding members of the Wound Healing Society met at the Marqueta Juarez Mexican Restaurant to decide that Tom

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Enclosed is a very rough outline for an American Wound Healing Foundation which evolved, I suppose, because I have had this dream floating around for several years only to discover that several of you have had the same dream. It's time we put it all together. I am not one for organizations, but I believe that this one can do a lot of good and be kept simple.

Please call or write to me of your interest in and criticisms of the project. I will try to collate the data and set up the time for us to get together for some formal structuring.

Names and ideas are all first thoughts at this point. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Chairman, Division of Plastic  
and Reconstructive Surgery

IKC/ecb

Enclosure

**FIGURE 1.** Text of letter distributed in 1987 calling for a meeting to establish a wound healing organization.

Hunt would be the first president of the Society for a 2-year term. It was also decided that the presidency would alternate between individuals possessing an MD and a PhD to maintain a balance in the Society leadership. Another crucial decision made at this meeting was that the organization would be a society and not a foundation, and the possibility of establishing a wound healing journal was discussed. Other Society officers were "elected" at the meeting, with Adrian Barbul serving as the first treasurer and Bob Diegelmann the inaugural secretary; both became responsible for keeping the Society alive during its formative years. Lastly, Marty Robson offered to host the first meeting in Galveston, Texas.

The second meeting of the Society, held in Richmond, Virginia, was hosted by Kel Cohen. At this meeting the decision was made to proceed with a journal, and Bill Lindblad was selected to be the first co-editor and managing editor, while Tom Hunt would be the other co-editor. After discussion of a number of potential titles, the current title *Wound Repair and Regeneration* was selected. The second president of the Society, Paul Ehrlich, was elected at this meeting, with Kel Cohen to follow after Paul. Thus, the Society was launched and the future was bright.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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