

## Survey finds 16 percent of burn patients test positive for PTSD

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A Loyola Medicine survey has found that 15.8 percent of adult burn patients screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The survey by clinical psychologist Elizabeth Simmons, PsyD, licensed clinical social worker Kelly McElligott, AM, and colleagues from Loyola Medicine's Burn Center was presented at the annual meeting of the American Burn Association, where it was named the top poster in the psychosocial category of the poster session.

"We identified a significant group of patients with elevated symptoms of PTSD who may benefit from further mental [health](#) assessment and intervention," Dr. Simmons said.

Loyola operates the largest burn center in Illinois and is a regional leader in burn care. Loyola's outstanding success rates and multidisciplinary approach are recognized by the American College of Surgeons and American Burn Association.

Burn injuries often are very traumatic and can lead to mental health disorders, especially acute stress disorder (ASD) and PTSD. Identifying patients who need further support and mental health treatment are important elements of providing comprehensive, multidisciplinary care.

PTSD is triggered by seeing or experiencing a terrifying event. Symptoms can include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety and uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

In the Loyola survey, a four-question PTSD screening test was administered to 1,020 burn [patients](#) in an outpatient clinic. Patients were asked if they had ever had an experience that was so frightening, horrible or upsetting that in the past month they:

- Had nightmares about it or thought about it when they did not want to
- Tried hard not to think about it or went out of their way to avoid situations that reminded them of it

- Were constantly on guard, watchful or easily startled
- Felt numb or detached from others, activities or their surroundings

Patients who answered "Yes" to three or four of the questions tested positive for PTSD. A positive result does not necessarily mean a patient has PTSD. But it does indicate a patient may have the condition or other trauma-related problems and may need to be evaluated by a [mental health](#) professional.

The screening test provided an opportunity to alert medical providers to distressing symptoms. A [social worker](#) also was notified and provided patient resources for additional support for those who screened positive.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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