

Frank, 51, former RNSH Burns Unit patient

A gas explosion in 2007 left Frank, 51, with life-threatening burns to more than 70 per cent of his body. The Sydney-sider, then 43, was put in a coma and his family were told the heart-breaking news he would not make it through the night.

The diligence and care provided by expert staff at the Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH) Burns Unit saw the father of two not only beat the odds and survive the accident, but also return to work. This is Frank's story.



In February 2007 Frank was welding at his mechanical workshop in Milperra when there was a gas explosion. Frank was initially taken to Concord Hospital but within hours, was transferred to RNSH where specialists were better suited to treat his types of burns.

"I sustained third-degree burns to 71 per cent of my body and was not expected to have survived the night.

"My family was told to make preparations for my death, and this continued for six weeks following the explosion. I spent 92 days in an induced coma in the RNSH intensive care unit and another following eight months in the intensive care burns unit at the hospital, where I was completely immobilised," said Frank.

Frank had 32 general anaesthetics while at RNSH, needing anaesthesia to numb the pain associated with changing his dressings. Frank had to relearn how to move and use his body during a 15-week-stay at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre in Ryde. Since returning home in May 2008, Frank has undergone a further eight operations mainly on his arms, hands and his heels to remove scar tissue, calcified bone and release tightness in tendons and joints.

"I've been back at work for four years now against the odds. I spent a total of 11 months at RNSH and the doctors and nurses there became part of my family.

"RNSH staff are exceptional and a cut above the rest in professionalism and the way they compose themselves. They've got their job cut out for them in the burns unit because every day is a horror story," Frank said.

"I have tried to re-pay them for saving my life by speaking to other burns survivors and assisting in programs coordinated by the Statewide Burn Injury Service (SBIS).

"The RNSH is an invaluable and life-saving asset to our community. There are only two burns units specifically for adults in Sydney, at RNSH and Concord Hospitals, and they need to be adequately supported by on-site services for patients and family members.

"While I understand the government has to make tough decisions, sometimes these decisions seem to be at the patients' expense. The hospital is over-crowded and the government desperately needs to address this issue rather than selling-off or leasing land," said Frank.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview with Frank Spiteri, please contact Kirsten Bruce or Ruby Archis from VIVA! Communications on 02 9968 3741 or 0401 717 566 / 0413 834 906.