

# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

**THE SAVE A LEG, SAVE A LIFE FOUNDATION IS HELPING TO DRIVE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF CHRONIC WOUNDS THROUGH EDUCATION, ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH.**

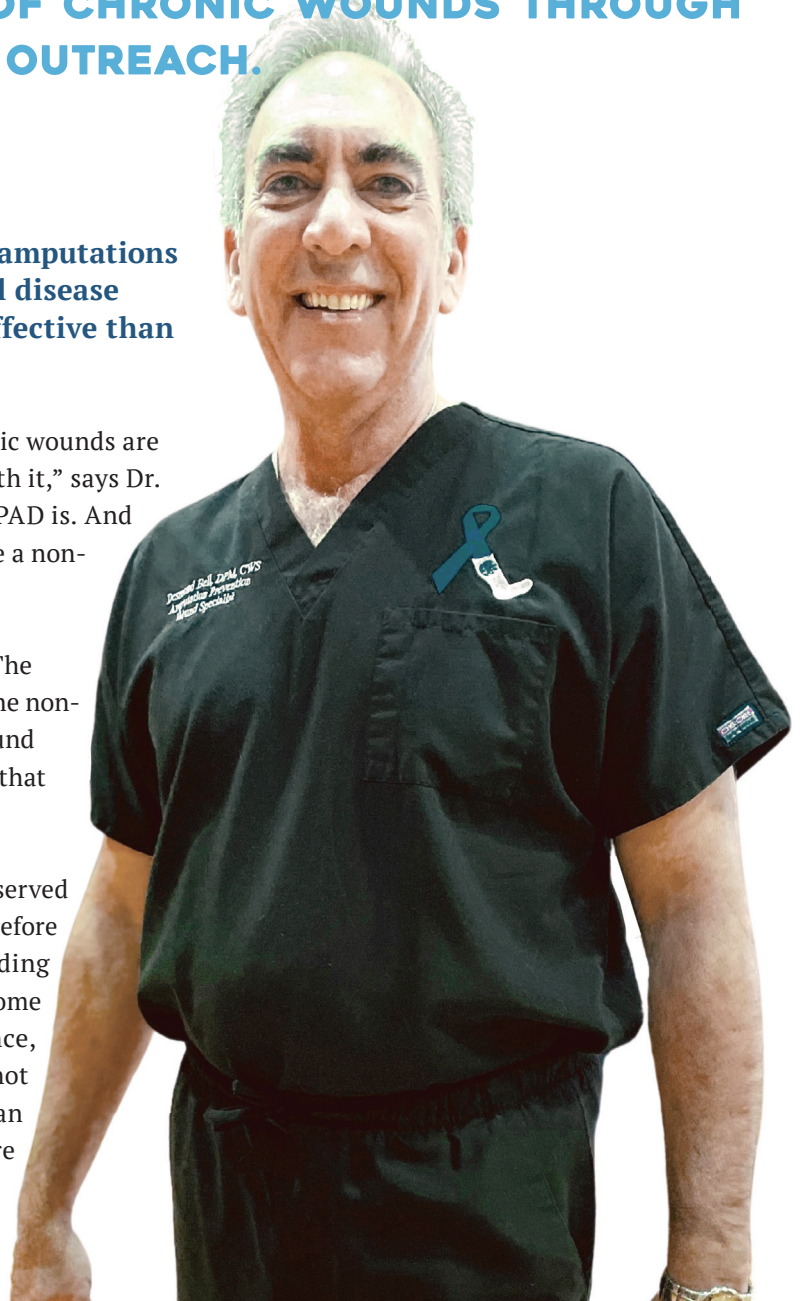
**When it comes to preventing lower-extremity amputations in people with diabetes and peripheral arterial disease (PAD), there is, perhaps, no tool that's more effective than information-sharing.**

“The general population tends to have no idea why chronic wounds are bad, or why diabetes has so many problems associated with it,” says Dr. Desmond Bell. “Most people also don't really know what PAD is. And they certainly don't understand what happens if you have a non-healing wound or need an amputation.”

Dr. Bell is working to change this state of affairs through The Save a Leg, Save a Life Foundation. Nicknamed SALSAL, the non-profit organization is dedicated to building awareness around the issues, care requirements and potential complications that can arise from diabetes- or PAD-related chronic wounds.

“The foundation happened organically,” says Dr. Bell, who served as a wound care specialist in Florida for more than 20 years before retiring from clinical practice in 2019. “I had a freestanding wound center in Jacksonville, and I would see patients come in with really basic things not being done—for instance, dressings not applied properly, or vascular assessments not being conducted. After a while I said to myself, ‘There's an issue here, and if we don't do something about it, then we're part of the problem.’”

*Dr. Desmond Bell, DPM, CWS. Founder and President of “The Save A Leg, Save A Life” Foundation*



As a first step, Dr. Bell and his colleagues hosted a lunch and learn for home-health nurses to teach them some basics about wound care, proper bandaging techniques and things to look out for with their patients.

The response to the lunch and learn was so positive that Dr. Bell and his team decided to host another, then another after that. Eventually, they opted to channel their efforts into something a little more concrete and, in 2015, SALSAL was born.

“Through SALSAL, we’re trying to empower people,” says Dr. Bell. “Our main principals are patient advocacy, outreach and education—and that means education for anyone in the general population as well as for health-care practitioners.”

Since its inception, the SALSAL Foundation has launched a number of effective initiatives, including a patient assistance program, scholarship opportunities for

clinicians, and the internationally recognized “white sock” campaign, which is helping to build broader awareness around amputation prevention.

The foundation has also begun to host screening events in underserved communities where people may be at higher risk for PAD or diabetes.

“In the past year, we’ve done three community outreach events,” says Dr. Bell. “One in Miami, where we hired a mobile health exam bus that we took to a church that serves African American congregants and undocumented Haitians. We also did one in Jacksonville Beach for a homeless shelter. And most recently, we held an event in Natchitoches, Louisiana.”

## THE NATCHITOCHEs CONNECTION

Situated in west-central Louisiana, the small city of Natchitoches (pronounced “Nack-a-tish”) is home to around 18,300 people—one of whom is a passionate wound care clinician by the name of Frank Aviles.

For nearly two decades, Aviles has been working tirelessly to improve wound healing outcomes within Natchitoches and beyond. Currently, he serves as the wound care clinical coordinator at Natchitoches Regional Medical Center, where he oversees and assists with wound care practices across the continuum of care.

Aviles met Dr. Bell back in 2008 at a Symposium of Advanced Wound Care (SAWC) event, and the two hit it off immediately.

“We sat down and had a beer,” recalls Aviles, adding that, while sipping their Blue Moons, they talked about the resource challenges Aviles faced as a patient advocate in a rural setting. In the ensuing years, the pair continued to cross paths as they worked in similar areas of wound care advocacy.

“As we started to grow SALSAL years later, I began looking for more board members, and I knew Frank would be a great fit,” says Dr. Bell. “There are so many people in wound care who are brilliant and passionate, yet they don’t have the time to invest in growing a foundation and really making a difference. But Frank is a doer. He walks the walk.”



Frank Aviles at the Louisiana SALSAL screening event

“I specifically wanted to include Kent’s Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> device at the event because I’ve found that when you bring technology into the mix, people are intrigued. I wanted to have technology to not only inform and educate, but wow them as well.”

**FRANK AVILES**

Aviles, who already had ample experience hosting wound care information sessions, was happy to join the SALSAL board and quickly got to work organizing a community screening and educational event in Natchitoches. He called on local health-care providers and other members of SALSAL to participate. He also reached out to a handful of health-care vendors—including Kent Imaging—to help with sponsorship and to demonstrate their respective products and technologies.

“I specifically wanted to include Kent’s Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> device at the event because I’ve found that when you bring technology into the mix, people are intrigued,” says Aviles. “I wanted to have technology to not only inform and educate, but wow them as well.”

The latest advancement in non-invasive imaging, Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> uses multiple wavelengths of near-infrared (NIR) light to provide clinicians with an accurate measure of soft tissue oxygenation at a wound site. Aviles, who has been using the device to assess wounds and confirm therapeutic impact since July 2021, felt Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> would be a perfect complement to the screening services offered at the SALSAL outreach program due to its size, speed, portability and actionable visual output to help guide decision-making.

He was right: Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> was put to good use that day.

## OUTREACH IN ACTION

The Natchitoches community screening was held at the city’s First Baptist Church on the morning of March 10, 2022. Each attendee was given a “passport,” which they brought from screening station to screening station as they underwent such things as vision assessment, measurement of vitals, ABI/TBI testing and gait analysis.

“For patients at SALSAL screening events, it takes about 15 to 20 minutes total to go through each station and keep the line moving. When they’re done, we collect the information recorded on their passports, review what we’ve found and talk to them about where we have concerns,” explains Dr. Bell, who traveled to Louisiana from Florida to take part in the event.





“Of course,” Dr. Bell adds, “while part of the point of events like this is to make it clear to people that screening is painless, we also work to make sure we have specialists we can refer them to, when needed.”

Among the notable screening cases at the Natchitoches event was an elderly woman whose ABI readings were concerning to Aviles. “When she first came in, it was clear she was scared,” Aviles says. “She told us she was a recluse and that she didn’t trust doctors. I was glad she actually showed up to get screened.”

Not wanting to exacerbate the woman’s fear yet knowing full well that she needed more testing before any kind of referral could be made, Aviles brought her to the Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> station for a clearer picture of what was going on.

“We took Snapshot images of her lower leg and what we saw was that, based on the readings, her tissue oxygenation levels were low,” he says.

Upon showing the patient the Snapshot<sub>NIR</sub> images and explaining their meaning, Aviles was able to convince the woman to allow the SALSAL team to set up an appointment for further vascular attention.

“Just by using Snapshot, we probably made a real difference for [that woman] and some other people who didn’t realize how serious their conditions were,” says Dr. Bell. “To be able to use a screening device like Snapshot that can

give us information in a short amount of time is really invaluable. As we grow our program and do more events around the country and elsewhere, wherever we have technology at our screenings, I think everyone benefits.”

## LOOKING FORWARD

The outreach event in Natchitoches didn’t end when the morning screenings were done.

“It’s one thing to build awareness through screening, but we also need to educate,” says Aviles, who, in addition to the screenings, organized a free lunch, an afternoon talk designed to provide attendees and local health-care workers with more information on diabetes and PAD, and then a panel discussion on wound care, featuring Dr. Bell, Aviles, Liz Faust, local wound care physician Dr. Margerite Picou, and the keynote speaker and recent patient, Dr. James Knecht.

It was a whole-day affair, and its success has inspired Dr. Bell, Aviles, and the rest of the SALSAL team to keep building momentum and take the outreach program further afield.

“Setting up these types of events, where people can attend with friends and family, then start calling more friends and family to come on down and get screened—to me that’s a great formula for success,” says Dr. Bell. “At the end of the day, we just want to try to get people to be proactive and learn, so that they can be their own advocates, too.” ■