

Nixon Doctors Seek to Avoid Surgery

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25—Despite what was described as “a small amount of bleeding from the gums,” former President Nixon will be maintained on his blood-thinning medication to try to avoid surgery, his doctor said.

The physician, Dr. John C. Lungren, issued a bulletin at noon today in which he said his patient “has had a minor side effect from anti-coagulation therapy which consists of a small amount of bleeding from the gums. This is not of sufficient magnitude to counter-indicate [rule out] continued closely monitored anti-coagulation therapy.” The statement was read by a spokesman for Memorial Hospital of Long Beach.

Mr. Nixon is suffering from a recurrence of thrombophlebitis, or the presence of blood clots in swollen veins. The patient, in addition to pain and uneasiness, runs the risk that a clot will break free from the wall of a vein, travel to the lungs, and cause death through congestion and disruption of the lungs' normal activity.

On Thursday, Lungren issued a statement in which he said surgery “is a real possibility” if Mr. Nixon does not respond to drug therapy. At that time he said that a deep vein in Mr. Nixon's left leg was “almost totally” obstructed. Lungren also said there were other clots in his patient's left thigh.

Mr. Nixon was previously hospitalized between Sept. 23 and Oct. 4 for blood clots in his left leg. At that time he

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was given two blood-thinning drugs, heparin and coumadin. Upon his discharge he was given coumadin to take orally at his home in San Clemente. Heparin can only be given intravenously.

However, daily monitoring of blood samples taken from the former President at San Clemente indicated he was not responding to the anti-coagulation therapy; that is, clots continued to form in his left leg.

When this diagnosis was confirmed through analysis at several laboratories, Mr. Nixon was rushed to the hospital late Thursday afternoon, where he is expected to stay until at least next week.

Lungren said Thursday that he was trying to determine whether Mr. Nixon is in a small group of patients whose systems are unable to satisfactorily respond to anti-coagulation drugs.

Today he said that the Long Beach hospital, and several other institutions around the country are conducting computerized studies to compare Mr. Nixon's reactions to the anti-coagulants with those of the other patients to see exactly what dosages would stop the clotting.

A source close to the Nixon family said today that he had been a model patient at home after his first hospitalization, taking his medicine, maintaining his low-cholesterol diet and restricting his physical activities.

If it turns out that Mr. Nixon cannot adequately respond to the anti-coagulation therapy, then surgery might be employed to remove the clots themselves or block off their passage through the veins of the body.

One problem with removing a clot or clots is that the long-range problem is not solved. Other clots can still form in the veins.

One solution is to tie off the vein. This process is known as ligation. In this case blood naturally finds its way to the heart through other veins, once the afflicted vein has been tied off.

Another procedure is to squeeze the afflicted vein surgically so that its passageways are still large enough for blood to flow through, but

not large enough to allow a clot to pass through.

Still another procedure is to insert a tiny screen in the vein, which also permits blood flow but stops a clot.

One doctor not connected with the case said that if surgery is employed, he would be concerned about whether to continue the anti-coagulation drugs during the surgical process. If they are not used, this doctor said, he would worry about the possibility of the sudden passage of a clot to the lungs during the very operation designed to prevent that passage.

In his statement today, Lungren said, “At this time, Dr. Eldon Hickman, my vascular surgical consultant, and I are satisfied with the progress former President Nixon is now exhibiting with the introduction of heparin and coumadin anti-coagulation therapy.” Lungren added that “both Dr. Hickman and I presented a review of the venogram (the test that showed the clot late Wednesday) to the former President and his wife” on Thursday night.

A special booklet published in 1973 by Memorial Hospital deals with the problems of using heparin for anti-coagulation purposes, such as Mr. Nixon's case.