

Doctors Silent on Nixon Tests

By Robert Meyers

Special to The Washington Post

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 26— Three court-appointed physicians said today they have reached a unanimous decision on whether former President Nixon is fit enough to testify in the Watergate cover-up trial.

They said the decision would be kept secret until they give their written opinion to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica in Washington Friday.

Drs. Charles A. Hufnagel, John A. Spittell Jr., and Richard Starr Ross, spent an hour and 50 minutes at La Casa Pacifica, Nixon's San Clemente estate Monday. They examined the former President for about an hour, Hufnagel said, declining to give any details.

"We met with and examined Richard Nixon with his consent and cooperation," Hufnagel said. He added that they had received full cooperation from Dr. Eldon Hickman, who is in charge of Nixon's recovery, and other doctors in the case.

Physicians not involved in the case have suggested that the three doctors principally examined Nixon for signs of stress, or a recurrence of phlebitis.

Nixon was hospitalized Sept.

23 for treatment of the disease. On Oct. 29, a hairpin-like clip designed to prevent the passage of clots from his leg to the lungs, where they can cause death, was placed on one of the ex-president's veins.

Shortly after surgery, however, Nixon went into shock for three hours, and remained on the critical list for several days. He left the hospital Nov. 14.

John D. Ehrlichman, Nixon's former chief domestic adviser, and a defendant in the six-week-old trial, has indicated that much of his defense rests on Nixon's testimony.

The prosecution has also requested his testimony.

Sirica listed seven specific questions for the doctors to answer. Their opinion, along with other material, will advise the judge as to whether Nixon is well enough to testify in some manner.

If the doctors say he can, they will further advise Sirica whether Nixon can travel to Washington, travel to a courthouse near his home for a deposition or merely give a deposition from his bed.

A deposition might be videotaped. Sirica might also temporarily move the trial to a courtroom near Nixon's estate in order to hear him.

He has not indicated when he will make his decision known.