

Doctors team might examine Nixon today

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Three doctors ordered to determine former President Richard M. Nixon's fitness to testify at the Watergate cover-up trial arrived here Sunday and said they may examine Nixon on Monday.

Dr. Charles Hufnagel said he and his two colleagues would visit Monday the hospital in nearby Long Beach where Nixon underwent surgery for blood clots.

After meeting with Nixon's surgeon, the team will examine Nixon at his San Clemente estate, probably later the same day.

If a study of medical records indicates an examination might cause excessive stress "we would so state and not proceed," Hufnagel said. "We would like to spare Mr. Nixon all the stress possible."

Complications following Nixon's Oct. 29 surgery for phlebitis, a vein inflammation in his leg that resulted in blood clots, included unexplained jumps in blood pressure at times of physical or mental stress, Nixon's doctors said.

Hufnagel, chief of surgery at Georgetown University Hospital, was selected by U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica to head the panel. The other doctors are Dr. John J. Spittel Jr., 49, of the Mayo Clinic and Dr. Richard Starr Ross, 50, of Johns Hopkins University.

Hufnagel said the team would arrive

at their opinion much as they would determine if a disabled employe would be able to return to work. He indicated he had experience in making such determinations.

Hufnagel declined to be specific about the panel's schedule, other than to say they would meet with Nixon's surgeon, Dr. Eldon Hickman, at Memorial Hospital Medical Center of Long Beach at 9 a.m. Monday.

He added that Nixon's personal physician, Dr. John N. Lungren, was on vacation, but Hufnagel said he had talked with Lungren by telephone.

"We have had full cooperation and the most cordial relations with all of Mr. Nixon's physicians," Hufnagel said.

Nixon, 61, has said he is not opposed to the examinations, although Lungren said last week he felt a physical examination could endanger the health of his patient.

The purpose of the doctors' examination is "not to challenge any medical opinion that has been rendered," said Hufnagel. "We come here without bias and we are not interested in what has occurred except as it relates to Mr. Nixon's ability to testify."

The panel's report on Nixon will be given to Sirica by Friday.