

Questions on Health of Nixon Involve Treatment and Courts

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

How sick is former President Richard M. Nixon?

That question is baffling everyone, apparently including some officials in the White House.

The answers to the seemingly limitless number of questions that have been asked in recent days about Mr. Nixon's mental and physical health are not clear.

However, the facts involved are of critical importance not just to the Nixon family but also to the nation's political and judicial systems.

Yesterday, Julie Nixon Eisenhower added to the confusion about the state of Mr. Nixon's health by disclosing that her father would be "hospitalized in a week or so because of the phlebitis."

Though Mr. Nixon apparently agreed to the recommendation, made by one of his doctors, Air Force Maj. Gen. Walter Tkach, last week, the timing of his hospitalization puzzled doctors familiar with the treatment of phlebitis.

Patients with a flare-up of chronic phlebitis, such as Mr. Nixon, are generally hospitalized so that treatment with blood-thinning, or anticoagulant, drugs can be started and diagnostic tests done immediately, not in a few weeks. Dr. Tkach has said he considered anticoagulant therapy "critical" in Mr. Nixon's case.

Some Open Questions

Mr. Nixon's apparent rejection of his doctors' medical recommendations—to take anticoagulants, to wear elastic leg stockings and to keep his left leg constantly outstretched and elevated—raise other unanswered questions, such as the following:

¶To what extent has Mr. Nixon aggravated his condition by such refusals?

¶If he had followed the prescribed therapy, would the phlebitis have cleared up by now?

¶Why announce his proposed hospitalization a week in advance? Is it a tactic to avoid appearing in court in the Watergate cover-up trial and others?

There is no way to get detailed answers to the questions that only Mr. Nixon and his physicians Dr. Tkach and Dr. John C. Lungren of Long Beach, Calif., can answer.

Yesterday, Dr. Lungren said in a telephone interview from his office in Long Beach, where he has a private practice in internal medicine:

"I examined him yesterday. I am treating him on a continuing basis."

Asked if Mr. Nixon had the

less dangerous superficial or the more dangerous deep venous thrombophlebitis, Dr. Lungren said he would have "no comment" until "I have observed him a little longer."

Dr. Lungren declined to confirm Mrs. Eisenhower's report that her father would enter a hospital. He cited the confidentiality of the patient-doctor relationship.

Dr. Lungren also said that he clearly understood the public confusion that had been raised by the lack of specific medical facts and details amid statements made by Nixon family members and the series of dramatic statements that Dr. Tkach made over the weekend.

New Blood Clot Cited

Dr. Tkach, after conferring with Dr. Lungren, issued a terse statement in San Clemente, Calif., saying that Mr. Nixon had developed a new blood clot and a flare-up of the chronic phlebitis in his left thigh.

Dr. Tkach's office at Andrews Air Force Base, where he has assumed a new job as command surgeon for the Air Force Base, where he has assumed a new job as command surgeon for the Air Force Systems Command, said the Air Force general was "unavailable" and did not want to discuss Mr. Nixon's case further with the press.

"Any actions that Dr. Tkach has had, or will have, in connection with the health of former President Nixon will be reported as required from San Clemente," a spokesman for Dr. Tkach said.

Dr. Tkach said in a statement that because his new duties required constant briefing, he would not have further statements until the briefing was completed. An Air Force spokesman estimated the briefings would last "several weeks." The spokesman added: "He's been away from the Air Force for several years."

Dr. Tkach's statement raised speculation in medical circles that he may not be returning to see Mr. Nixon at San Clemente, as he had said he was scheduled to do later this week.

Meanwhile, Howard K. Smith, the television commentator, reported, "It has now been learned by C News that Dr. Tkach did not personally examine Mr. Nixon's leg but took the word of a California physician, Dr. John C. Lungren, that the phlebitis had spread to the thigh."

Dr. Tkach, an Air Force spokesman said, would not comment on the report.

Dr. Lungren also said he had "no comment" on the ABC report.