

Phlebitis Is Linked to Watergate

By JANE E. BRODY

Doctors who have studied the effects of psychological stress on susceptibility to physical illness and, in particular, on the body's clotting mechanism, believe that pressures related to the Watergate scandal may have had a great deal to do with Richard M. Nixon's recent repeated attacks of phlebitis.

Since Mr. Nixon resigned the Presidency in August, a number of clots have developed in his phlebitis-stricken left leg, and one large clot necessitated emergency surgery Tuesday to prevent further complications.

Early in this century, the famed Harvard physiologist Walter B. Cannon showed that when people were under great stress, their blood clotted much more readily. In the nineteen-fifties, two San Francisco cardiologists found that the clotting tendency of certified public accountants was greatest during the first four months of the year, peaking on April 15, incometax day.

Recent animal studies conducted by Dr. Jacob I. Haft and his co-workers at Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital have demonstrated that stress—both emotional and physical—causes the blood platelets, the initiators of clots, to get stuck together.

"Undoubtedly," Dr. Haft said, "stress has an effect on clotting throughout the body, and the severe emotional stress Nixon has been under these last few months very likely is playing a role in his tendency to form clots."

Predisposed to Illness

Other researchers noted that for stress to induce or aggravate an illness, the person must have a predisposition to that illness, as Mr. Nixon has had at least since 1965, when he is said to have suffered his first phlebitis attack.

These researchers have shown that susceptibility to illness increases when a person experiences an overwhelming loss of has difficulty adjusting to changes in life circumstances. Such difficulties can also impair recovery once the illness develops.

According to one expert, Dr. Lawrence E. Hinkle of Cornell Medical Center, "If Mr. Nixon has severe emotional and psychological conflicts that are continuing and unresolved, they would likely be a factor that would interfere with his recovery."

Another expert, Dr. George L. Engel, professor of medicine and psychiatry at the University of Rochester, said that President Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon might have compounded the situation. "Nixon was apparently unable to take recourse in what many others do in such a situation—repent and acknowledge they did something wrong," Dr. Engel said.

He added: "The pardon left him defenseless. Preparing his defense might at least have provided him with a productive activity."

'A Massive Change'

While stating that he knew nothing personally about Mr. Nixon's psychological state, Dr. Engel said it was apparent to all that the former President "has experienced a massive change in his life characteristics by loss of power, prestige, influence, associates, etc., and finds himself in a situation where he has exceedingly limited resources with which to respond."

He said that the Nixon case was consistent with his research findings that feelings of "impasse and giving up" can

precipitate physical illness.

Dr. Hinkle emphasized that "in order for a person to suffer a major adverse reaction to an event, the event has to be a meaningful thing to him."

"As I read the life of Richard Nixon," Dr. Hinkle continued, "it was focused on being President and being President at all costs and, once he became President, wishing to go down as an outstanding President. No

doubt the crumbling of this dream is very meaningful to him.

"Outwardly, he may have appeared composed, but his inward reaction may have been—and probably was—major and profound."

Dr. Hinkle said, that in his view, "Most physicians would have to agree that Mr. Nixon's recent illness is a result of what he's been through and his reaction to it."