



Associated Press

Court-appointed doctors arrive at Long Beach hospital to see records. From left, Drs. Spittell, Ross and Hufnagel.

Doctors at San Clemente to See Nixon

LONG BEACH, Calif., Nov. 25 (AP) — Three court-appointed doctors drove to Richard M. Nixon's oceanside villa today to examine him in determining if the former President is well enough to testify at the Watergate cover-up trial.

The physicians left for San Clemente after apparently deciding that a physical exam would not cause dangerous stress to Nixon. Dr. Eldon B. Hickman, Nixon's surgeon, accompanied them.

They made no comments to reporters.

A decision that the exam would be safe for Nixon, still convalescing from phlebitis surgery, was apparently reached after Dr. Charles Hufnagel, head of the medical team, and the other doctors arrived at Memorial Hospital Medical Center of Long Beach. They studied X-rays of Nixon's phlebitis-stricken left leg, lung examinations and other records compiled during his two stays at Memorial Hospital.

They also met behind locked doors with Hickman, who operated on Nixon on Oct. 29 to prevent blood clots from breaking loose in Nixon's left leg and traveling to his heart and lungs, where they could be fatal.

After the surgery it was reported that Nixon suffered near-fatal internal bleeding.

The doctors' determination

on Nixon's health is to be made by Friday to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica. If the former President is too weak to travel, he may be asked to give a deposition at his home or his testimony may be videotaped.

While Nixon, 61, was said to be unopposed to the examination, Hickman and Nixon's personal physician, Dr. John C. Lungren, have expressed concern that it would cause Nixon excessive stress.

Lungren, now on vacation, had warned the stress might cause Nixon's blood pressure to rise dangerously high and trigger internal bleeding.

Hufnagel told an airport news conference on his arrival Sunday, "We would like to spare Mr. Nixon all the stress possible."

He also said the doctors "had full cooperation and the most cordial relations with all of Mr. Nixon's physicians."

The purpose of the doctors' examination was "not to challenge any medical opinion that has been rendered," Hufnagel added. "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."

Hufnagel said he and the other doctors would arrive at their opinion much as they would determine if a disabled employee could return to work.

Nixon's doctors have said he

lapsed into shock and almost died from hemorrhaging after surgery. He was listed in critical condition for six days. Later it was reported that he was experiencing dramatic jumps in blood pressure at times of physical or mental stress. He returned home to San Clemente Nov. 14.

Hufnagel is chief of surgery at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington. The other doctors are Dr. John J. Spittell Jr., 49, of the Mayor Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and Dr. Richard Starr Ross, 50, of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.