

The Man Who Doctors the

By Vera Glaser

Washington

The man in charge of the first family's health is tall, rangy Dr. William Matthew Lukash, a Navy admiral and a specialist in digestive diseases.

Lukash is Ford's shadow at home, abroad, at parties, on the campaign trail or golf links. He rides one car behind the President with the Secret Service and often is mistaken for an agent.

The 43-year-old physician was thrust into the spotlight recently when he shared the ordeal of First Lady Betty Ford's cancer surgery, an experience that brought the friendly, soft-spoken Lukash closer to the Fords.

In a recent interview, he made one thing clear — Lukash is not gung-ho for medication or vitamins.

He has taken Mrs. Ford off two drugs she used for years to ease the pain of a pinched nerve at the back of her neck — Equagesic and Valium.

And he said a recurrence of cancer "is not clinically indicated" in the recent flareup of back pain that kept Mrs. Ford from accompanying her husband to Martinique.

As for the President, Lukash permits him one multi-B vitamin daily, and would just as soon dispense with that.

Ford takes no other medication, Lukash said, and he would "never" prescribe a stimulant such as Dexedrine to help a tired chief executive stay alert for a crucial meeting. (The late President



Kennedy reportedly took an occasional amphetamine under doctors' prescriptions.)

The Fords make Lukash's job easier by being health-conscious, he said, and both appear to be in fine shape.

Ford, at 61, shows the bounce and rugged physique of a man ten years younger. Mrs. Ford is frail, but active and cheerful despite her surgery and chemotherapy.

At the White House, Lukash works in a handsome ground-floor office decorated in bright yellow, with fine furnishings and oil paintings.

An electronic printer, resembling an airline schedule board, rests on a shelf over Lukash's desk, changing

constantly, telling him precisely where the President is at that moment. Ford's type-written daily schedule

Dr. William Lukash, Mr. Ford's physician, is often mistaken for a Secret Service agent

perches in a holder at the left.

Lukash and his assistant, Dr. Chester Ward, (aided by a pair of nurses and two Navy corpsmen) also treat the Ford children and White House staff.

At 9:30 one morning last week, his monitor read "cabinet room." Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger were meeting there with congressional leaders, and for the moment Lukash had no patients.

Leaning back in his chair, he spoke slowly, his gray eyes wary. He knows that a word about the President's health can set the nation on edge.

"I didn't want to upset the country. It was a big dilemma," Lukash said, referring to his recent decision to

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keep Mrs. Ford at home when her husband met the French president at Martinique.

Mrs. Ford's back trouble, which caused the change in plans, has been with her "off and on for twelve years," Lukash said. He described it as "degenerative arthritis," suggested her pinched nerve was related to it and reported that she is responding so well to "hot packs, simple analgesics, and mild muscle relaxants," that the treatment may be discontinued shortly.

When Ford took office, Lukash examined him, and, although the Cancer Society might object, permitted him to continue smoking seven or eight pipefuls a day.

Lukash acknowledged that the President "probably" inhales, but said he has found no evidence of lung disease or effects on the mouth lining.

"Since he said it was so relaxing," Lukash recalled, "I didn't hesitate to say okay."

The President, according to Lukash, "shows normal signs of fatigue" which his doctor regards as good because, "if you are uptight and tense you don't show the signs." Lukash added, "It is remarkable that with his schedule he can leave everything in the office, go upstairs and relax with the family. They usually stay up until about midnight, but the President is up at 5:30 a.m."

Lukash and his wife happen to be from Ford's home state, where Lukash took his degree at the University of Michigan. He interned at Wayne County General Hospital and joined the Navy Medical Corps, specializing in internal medicine.

In 1967, Lukash came to the White House, first as part-time physician to Johnson and Nixon, and now as Ford's fulltime doctor, at a salary of \$38,000.

"Now I've switched from super-specialist to family practitioner," Lukash said, "and I'm finding it rewarding."