

Gradual Nixon Gains Seen Despite 'Lurking' Dangers

Ex-President Gets 2 More Transfusions as New Complication, a Decrease in a Blood Element, Develops

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LONG BEACH, Calif., Oct. 31 —Former President Richard M. Nixon's doctors said late today that they expected gradual improvement in his condition, but that they remained concerned over postoperative complications and "dangers lurking in the background."

Mr. Nixon's vital signs were described today as stable. But Dr. John C. Lungren, a former President's physician, said that Mr. Nixon had developed a new complication in which there was a decrease in his platelets, elements that play a critical role in the clotting of blood.

As a result, Mr. Nixon received two more transfusions with whole fresh blood and fresh platelets today.

Dr. James A. Harper, a member of the team that operated on Mr. Nixon Tuesday, said at a news conference this afternoon at 4:15 Pacific Time that the next 24 to 72 hours would be critical.

However, Dr. Harper added, "we expect gradual improvement." Dr. Harper appeared at the news conference with Dr. Lungren and Dr. Eldon Hickman, the vascular surgeon who

Doctors Expecting Gradual Nixon Gains

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Lungren said that Mr. Nixon "was on the brink of death the other day" when he went into shock six hours after surgery. The operation was performed to prevent a potentially lethal blood clot from traveling from his left leg to his lungs. Dr. Hickman placed a clamp on a vein in the former President's pelvis.

Initially, Dr. Lungren reported Mr. Nixon to be making normal postoperative recovery, but then shock developed suddenly.

"If the proper measures had not been taken, he may have died," Dr. Lungren said.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Lungren said in a bulletin that an "alert" Mr. Nixon had "spent a more restful night" although his condition remained critical. He said at 10:15 A.M., "It is still premature to offer a prognosis at this time."

The Long Beach specialist in internal medicine said that he was keeping Mr. Nixon on the critical list at Memorial Hospital Medical Center because "the possibilities exist for further complications." He added:

"His spirits and mental attitude are excellent. He is alert, oriented to everything going on around him and cooperative."

Dr. Lungren had omitted specific mention of Mr. Nixon's mental state in his bulletin yesterday.

The Nixon family spent from early morning until late evening at the hospital. Dr. Lungren, who has treated the Nixon family for many years, said, "Mrs. Nixon visits her husband, and Julie and Tricia visit with their dad briefly at hourly intervals."

Mr. Nixon's blood pressure was reported as 140/80 and

his pulse 80 and regular. Both values were within the range that doctors consider normal.

But Dr. Lungren's bulletin did not mention Mr. Nixon's respiratory rate and temperature, which doctors generally include in the phrase "vital signs." Earlier, Dr. Lungren said that Mr. Nixon had a slight fever, but he did not specify the degree.

Dr. Lungren said in an interview that Mr. Nixon had not experienced kidney failure, one of the most dangerous complications of shock.

Mr. Nixon's precarious state is threatened by further bleeding. Dr. Lungren said today, "we are keeping in mind the possibility of a slow oozing of blood into the retro-peritoneal space."

This is the area behind the peritoneum, the membrane that encloses the intestines. It is the area into which Dr. Lungren said Mr. Nixon bled Tuesday. It is also the area in which Dr. Eldon Hickman clamped a vein through which blood flows from the leg to the heart.

In today's bulletin, Dr. Lungren said, "There has been a slight drop in his hemoglobin count of one-half gram since last night. The significance of this change is being evaluated this morning. It may represent normal hemodilution"—further bleeding.

Hemoglobin is the oxygen-carrying pigment that helps to color blood cells red. Measurement of this is one way doctors can determine the blood-cell count. Mr. Nixon's normal hemoglobin count could be expected to be about 15 grams.

For Blood Transfusions

In ordinary circumstances, most physicians would regard a difference of one-half gram in successive hemoglobin tests as of little significance. The difference would be attributed

to imprecisions in laboratory measurements.

But Mr. Nixon appeared to have lost about 40 per cent of his total blood volume, according to Dr. Lungren's bulletin. The former President has received four blood transfusions since Tuesday and an unspecified number of quarts of salt water and other fluids to restore the stability of his vital signs.

Adult men have about 10 pints of blood, which constitute about 7 per cent of their weight. About half the weight of the same person is water that is distributed throughout the cells of the body. About three-fourths of muscle is water, for example.

Tremendous shifts of water and vital chemicals like potassium can occur within the body as a result of shock. Accordingly, the hemoglobin count can vary as Mr. Nixon's body readjusts to the blood and fluids that drip from bottles on a pole at the bedside into his veins.

But the fact that Mr. Nixon received the equivalent amount of red cells in one pint of blood yesterday and then dropped his hemoglobin count by one-half gram could point to more bleeding. This is why Mr. Nixon's doctors said that they would be repeating the hemoglobin among a host of other tests.

Depending on the source of the bleeding, Mr. Nixon might need another operation, according to interviews with doctors not connected with the case.

Dr. Lungren's bulletin today also omitted further comment on the "paralytic ileus" condition that affects Mr. Nixon's intestines. Dr. Lungren's medical team had inserted a tube into Mr. Nixon's stomach through his nose to help correct the situation.

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