

Sirica's Condition Is Serious

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Federal Judge John J. Sirica, who suffered a nearly fatal heart attack while delivering a speech Thursday, was removed from the critical list and reported in serious condition yesterday afternoon at George Washington University Hospital.

"We couldn't ask for more considering what he's been through," Dr. Joel Gorfinkel, associate director of the hospital's coronary care unit, said of the 71-year-old jurist who became nationally famous while presiding over the Watergate trials.

Gorfinkel said that 15 minutes after his heart attack, Judge Sirica came about as close to death as one can and survive. "He was clinically pulseless and had no respiration. His respiration and cardiac pumping were being maintained by external support," Gorfinkel said.

Sirica was well enough



JUDGE JOHN J. SIRICA

... taken off critical list

yesterday to eat breakfast and lunch and to be visited briefly by his wife, a son and daughter, his law clerk and Deputy U.S. Marshal William DeLodovico, whom Gorfinkel credited with saving the judge's life and apparently averting brain damage.

Gorfinkel said Sirica, who was speaking at a George Washington University law school alumni meeting at the Army-Navy Club, was stricken because one of the

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coronary arteries pumping blood to part of his heart became blocked as the result of a gradual accumulation of fatty substances along the artery wall.

"Unless someone acts within four minutes of this state, the brain will die" from lack of oxygen, Gorfinkel said.

DeLodovico began administering artificial ventilation and respiration and external cardiac massage to Sirica almost immediately after the judge collapsed without warning in mid-sentence. Two unidentified doctors who were guests of the club responded quickly to assist.

By pressing hard on Sirica's chest and blowing air into his mouth, DeLodovico and the doctors triggered Sirica's circulatory system into functioning at about one-fifth the effectiveness of normal but enough to sustain him, Gorfinkel said.

During the quick ambulance trip to George Washington Hospital, DeLodovico said yesterday, "I was talking to him saying, 'Judge, wake up.'"

But DeLodovico said there was no sign of life from the judge, whose open eyes were glassy-looking. DeLodovico said an ambulance attendant at one point remarked, "He's gone."

Gorfinkel said yesterday that Sirica was "alert and oriented this morning. He has no complaints of any pain or breathlessness. He has experienced a minor problem with lung congestion which has responded well to conventional therapy."

Bob Ruyak, Sirica's law clerk, said the judge looked well when he visited him briefly yesterday. As a patient in the hospital's eight-bed coronary unit, Sirica's visitors are strictly limited and a deputy marshal is keeping others away from his room.

When Sirica arrived at the hospital at 1:30 p.m. Thur-

sday, his color was a dusky red-blue. His heart and lungs were functioning only with artificial assistance. But the resuscitation efforts were enough to keep the blood flowing to the brain, preventing damage there, Gorfinkel said.

Emergency room attendants immediately placed a tube of oxygen down the judge's windpipe and applied

an electric shock to his heart. This at once ended a state of fibrillation — in which the heart and lungs don't function — and got them working again.

Gorfinkel said Sirica's heart is functioning normally now except that one artery is still blocked, leaving a portion of the judge's heart permanently damaged.

However, Gorfinkel added, the heart's healthy portions have enough reserve capacity to keep circulation flowing sufficiently. "It's like an airplane running on three engines instead of four," he said.

He said it is too early to know whether Sirica's physical activity will be restricted. In more severe heart attack cases, patients may have to curtail their activities permanently and in some cases may not be able to rise from a chair without putting too much strain on the weakened heart.

Gorfinkel said the cardiac pulmonary resuscitation — known as "CPR" — that saved Sirica is employed routinely on patients throughout the nation. "The only thing that makes this case any different is that it happened to Judge Sirica," he said.

Nevertheless, Dr. Gorfinkel said, 60 per cent of those who have heart attacks die before they reach a hospital, largely because of lack of proper resuscitation. George Washington Hospital currently is teaching CPR techniques to fire and rescue workers.