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While Volunteers Learn about Cancer

'Patients' Day Off' Fights Homesickness

By William Erwin

Junior Woman's Club volunteers here are shaking off some myths about cancer while they help Duke cancer patients shake off homesickness.

In a program called "Patients' Day Off," a club volunteer drives to the hospital every week. She picks up a group of women patients and whisks them away for a morning of shopping, maybe, or a quiet evening in a restaurant. Once, the group was even treated to an organ recital by Duke professor of music Fenner Douglass.

"We wanted to help get them out of the hospital environment, show them that someone in the community cared about them," said Mrs. June Stilley, chairman of the club's Home Life Committee.

Like the volunteers, the patients are young. Most are a long way from home. They're being treated at the Comprehensive Cancer Center for a rare cancer of the uterus called choriocarcinoma.

For five days straight, the women get anti-cancer drugs. Then they get a week's rest before the drugs begin again in a cycle that lasts for 12 weeks or longer — long enough to bring on a stiff case of homesickness.

"These patients may be unique in that they're hospitalized until they're well," said Dr. Charles Hammond, who directs their therapy. "This is a highly curable malignancy, so we're justified in pulling out all the stops."

The disease is almost 100 per cent



I'M GLAD IT'S NOT A FLUTE—Music professor Fenner Douglass displayed one of the largest pipes in the university's Flentrop Organ during a recital held for cancer patients and their Junior Women's Club hosts. The volunteer organization

arranged for the recital as part of their continuing "Patients' Day Off" program. At right is Mrs. Richard Prentis Jr., one of the volunteers. (Photo by Thad Sparks)

curable if caught before it spreads beyond the uterus, he said.

Outside the medical profession, however, many think cancer of any sort spells doom, Mrs. Stilley indicated.

"Some people say: 'I don't want to know if I have cancer. If I've got it, I'm done for anyway.' But that fear vanishes when you deal with girls like these," she said. "You see there is a cure when you take care of yourself and nip the thing in the bud."

Some club members, she said, were afraid they might "catch" cancer from the patients if they volunteered for the program. "That's really silly," she added.

While volunteers sift cancer facts from the myths, they're helping the patients feel a lot less lonesome.

"Last July, eight patients came to my home for dinner," Mrs. Stilley said. "Those who had children seemed to enjoy being around mine; the family environment is something they miss."

They also miss their normal routines, said Mrs. Bev Rosen, head of rehabilitation for the Cancer Center. She and Hammond conceived the "Patients' Day Off" last spring and asked the Junior Woman's Club to take part.

"These patients' roles and lifestyles are disrupted by their long hospitalization," Mrs. Rosen said. "They're used to leading active lives; they're used to getting out. What we're trying to do is help them feel like the normal human beings that they are. They're not freaks just

because they have cancer."

Normal though the patients are, they have an extra burden of worries that the program helps soothe.

"These young women are here for a significant interval of time," said Hammond. "Much of that time, they're not acutely ill, but they're suffering separation anxiety from their family and friends."

The program, he said, "helps them feel that there's more to life than

hibernating up here. Just knowing that people do care about them makes them happier patients better able to stand the psychic rigors of therapy."

Said Mrs. Stilley, "It's worked wonders for us, as well as for the patients."

And what do the patients think of the program?

"If you can get out and forget a bit," said one, "it helps."

Sharing Some THOUGHTS

by

Dr. William G. Anlyan

Vice President for Health Affairs



Over the past couple of years, there has been an increasing interest in *Intercom* among people outside the immediate medical community.

Many of these are Duke graduates, or former employees who have gone elsewhere, or former faculty members who have moved to other medical schools. Still others are patients, who have picked up a copy of our weekly newspaper when they were here, or just interested friends of Duke.

The way the people in this cross-section of backgrounds have demonstrated their interest in *Intercom* is by asking to be added to our mailing list. A few others are

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Body-Mapping To Improve Diagnosis of Heart Defects

Earlier and more accurate diagnosis of congenital heart defects is the object of a \$38,000 clinical research grant to Duke from the National Foundation-March of Dimes.

Receiving the grant is Dr. Madison Spach, a professor of pediatrics and chief of pediatric cardiology. Spach and Dr. Roger C. Barr, a biomedical engineer, have developed a technique for recording what they call "total body electrocardiograms."

Through use of a small computer, they can record and organize up to 150 separate measurements into a body surface map of electrical activity. Its design is to give physicians an improved way to detect congenital heart defects in infants and help determine promptly whether they will require surgery or some other treatment.

The Duke study is believed to be

unique in that it's the only known study that focuses on very young infants, whose electrocardiograms (EKGs) are usually quite different from those of other children and adults, Spach said. Also, he said, infants' EKGs change rapidly with age as their hearts mature, so what is normal for one infant may signal trouble for another at a different age.

The researchers will collect records of which EKG changes accompany normal heart development and which ones indicate congenital defects. They also will test a simplified body-mapping technique to see if 24 measurements instead of the 150 now used will provide equally reliable information.

Other pediatric cardiologists working with Spach on the project are Drs. Woodrow Benson, Samuel Edwards and Gerald Serwer.