

Removing casts as easy as opening sardines, say A&M bioengineers

Bioengineers from Texas A&M University are making some medical problems less troublesome for children. Their applications help patients at the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children in Dallas, when medical expertise indicates the need.

One of the bioengineers' ideas probably ranks, in achievement, ahead of building the proverbial better mousetrap.

It involves removing casts, normally done with a noisy electric saw that frightens children. Cast-removal saws have even been known to make adults blanch.

The Texas A&M engineers came up with a cast-removing technique that's as easy and unscary as opening a can of sardines. They place a braided wire on the cotton underlayer next to the skin, over which the cast is constructed.

The cast is marked where the

ends of the wire are located. To remove the cast, the ends of the wire are uncovered and rolled on a special wrench, much like the key on a sardine can. It causes the wire to cut through the cast.

Howard Alexander and Keith Wauters, Texas A&M graduate students in bioengineering, had high percentage success with the wire cast cutter, on long and short casts. They believe it will cut all but the thickest plaster casts. Saws will still be required on fiberglass casts used by some physicians.

Alexander, from Tyler, and Wauter, from San Antonio, worked for physicians, nurses, physical and occupational therapists at the Dallas hospital under a program funded by the King Foundation.

Wauters and Alexander helped a 7-year-old girl who can't use her legs. She was born with an opening in the spine which left her legs and lower body paralyzed. Breathing

becomes difficult if she tries to sit up, so a wheelchair could not be adapted.

She moved around, slowly and laboriously, by dragging her body along the floor with her arms.

Now she can breeze through a room almost as fast as any normal youngster, on a small plastic cart moulded to her body.

Another bioengineering device helps scoliosis patients. These patients must wear heavy braces — from beneath the chin to the hips — to hold the spine straight and keep curvature of the spine caused by the disease from becoming worse.

Still in development, the device consists of a system of straps that go over the chest and hold a small metal rod in place over the spine. If a patient leans too far or slumps, bending stress on the rod triggers a small, soundless vibrator in the patient's pocket that warns him to change his posture.

"The students in this program have given us new ways to solve problems for our patients," said Dr. Tony Herring, chief of staff of the hospital. "We know the medical problem, but we don't know anything about engineering."

The program brings the doctor and bioengineer together right time.

Dr. William Hyman of the engineering faculty at Texas Industrial Engineering Dept. said other students will be trained by Wauters and Alexander.

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what's up

Tuesday

MOVIE: "The Caine Mutiny," starring Humphrey Bogart, will be shown at 8:45 p.m. in the Grove Theater. (G).

SINGING CADETS: Will leave for Hawaii today.

ENTERTAINMENT: Shake Russell will be playing at Grins and Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. Admission is \$3.50 at the door.

RHIZOBIUM CONFERENCE: This conference for nitrogen fixation scientists, focuses on research with plants that depend on atmospheric nitrogen fixation. The conference, which Monday is hosted by the Agricultural Experiment Station and Crop Sciences Department and will continue through Tuesday in the Rudder Center.

Wednesday

MOVIE: "My Fair Lady," the classic starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison, will be shown at 8:45 p.m. in the Grove Theater. (G).

ENTERTAINMENT: Shake Russell will be playing at Grins and Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. Admission is \$3.50.

ENGLISH CONFERENCE: There will be a conference of the Association of Departments of English, one of three planned for the nation this summer. The conference, to be held Saturday in the Rudder Center.

Thursday

MOVIE: "Wizards," an animated cartoon movie will be shown at 8:45 p.m. in the Grove Theater. (PG).

DEADLINE: Thursday is the last day for dropping a course with penalty.

ENTERTAINMENT: Mike Williams, from Austin, will play at 8:30 p.m. Admission is \$2 at the door.

Friday

CALENDAR: Any person, group or organization who would like to have something printed in the what's up column should fill out a form provided in Room 216, Reed McDonald. The name, date, purpose of the event should be included.

MOVIE: "Silver Streak," starring Richard Pryor, will be shown at 8:45 p.m. in the Grove Theater. (PG).

MIDNIGHT MOVIE: "Young Frankenstein," starring Gene Wilder and Marty Feldman, will be shown in the Grove Theater. (R).

Saturday

MOVIE: "Dr. Zhivago," starring Omar Sharif and Julie Christie, will be shown at 8:45 p.m. in the Grove Theater. (PG).

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