

Students volunteer for flu research

By PAM BARNES
Reporter

When the first flu case of 1984 was diagnosed at the Texas A&M student health center on the first day of the spring semester, a phone call was made to the Baylor College of Medicine's Influenza Research Center in Houston.

Doctors who had spent the previous week setting up on the second floor of the health center left Houston and came immediately to begin the fourth year of flu research here.

The one flu case was soon replaced by an epidemic. The doctors involved with this research have been working day and night treating flu patients — a pace that is likely to continue until March when the flu season is expected to end.

Dr. Greg Willis, a clinical associate with the research program, admits that because of the epidemic the pace is tiring.

"We've seen more patients in the last nine days than last year's researchers saw in two months," Willis said. "The first couple of weeks felt like a month."

Willis, along with Nancy Hayes and Leon Dure, make up the team of clinical associates who examine the flu patients. Working closely with them is Dr. Wilson, an associate professor at Baylor College of Medicine. Wilson designed and built a machine that plays a key role in the research program.

The three clinical associates on Baylor are recent medical school graduates awaiting their internship assignments in March. They have left families and friends to spend three months here working on the research program.

"They are living in the health center and eating in the health center cafeteria. Wilson said they are being treated great.

"The food is excellent," Willis said. "The people really look out for us. We really like 'aches,' the cook," he said.

"The people here are really terrific," Hayes said. "The people at the medical school and the health center and especially the student body. I don't know what we would do without the outstanding cooperation."

The doctors haven't been able to enjoy the campus or city much and all laughed when Wilson told about one of their few outings together.

They remembered seeing a "chicken place" close to campus and thought a meal out would be a nice change. They had, of course, seen the infamous Dixie Chicken at Northgate and found rattlesnakes, burgers and beer instead of fried chicken.

The research team's day begins at 6 a.m. when they make their first rounds of the day and it doesn't end until around 11:30 that night. Then one of the associates is on call during the night. They take turns being on call every third night.

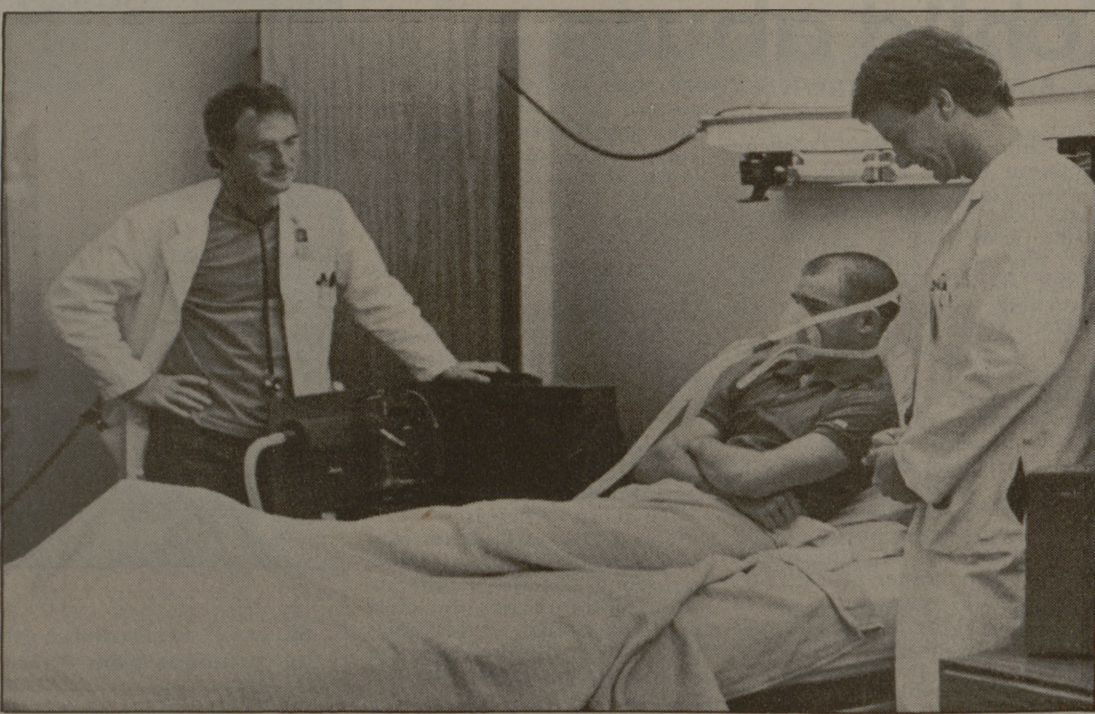
Their days are busy. The patients are seen twice a day by two of the doctors. Between rounds there is paper work and new patients have to be admitted, examined, and assigned to a room with one of the research machines.

The machine mixes the investigational drug, Ribavirin, with a mist and sends it through a mask to the patient. The patient wears the mask 12 to 16 hours a day to breathe the drug into the respiratory passages where the virus is.

"We don't like to call the drug experimental," he said. "We call it investigational because we know it works."

Leon Dure said that because the drug is administered through a mist and is given in relatively low doses it has no known side effects.

The research program is a joint effort between the Texas A&M College of Medicine and the Baylor College of Medicine. All samples are sent to the medical school here to be evaluated. Then they are either stored for



Dr. Leon Dure, left, and Dr. Greg Willis, right, check on Clay LaGrone, a freshman biochemistry major from

Tulsa, Ok. The doctors are part of a group from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Photo by ERIC EVAN LEE

further use or dispensed to other areas of flu research.

It's a double blind study, Willis said. This means that neither the patient nor the observing doctor knows whether the drug is being administered. This way there's an accurate and fair account of the drug's effect, he said.

Those patients who receive the mist without the drug get plenty of bedrest and other usual treatments, so they get well anyway, Hayes said.

"That's why the study is being done on college students," Hayes said. "They have stamina and are generally healthy, other than the flu."

Other reasons why the research is being done at Texas A&M is because it is close to

Houston and it is predictable, Hayes said.

"College students come back from spending Christmas in all parts of the country and breathe on each other," she said. "The researchers know that every year at least some students will get the flu."

To be eligible for the study a patient must be diagnosed at the health center as having a temperature of 101 degrees or more, must be at least 18 years old and must not have had the flu for more than 24 hours.

The flu victim is paid \$72 for spending three days in the hospital and participating in the program. After three days the patient is encouraged to return for occasional follow up visits

and is paid \$20 a visit. The study will pay up to \$132.

The health center has 12 of the machines used in the study and prefers to have 14 volunteers. Volunteers are needed and encouraged to participate in the study, Willis said.



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IBM loans A&M industrial robot system

University News Service
The International Business Machine Corp. has turned to Texas A&M for research on robotics applications.

IBM's Austin plant has loaned Texas A&M's engineering technology department an industrial robot system valued at more than \$150,000 and will provide \$50,000 a year for three years to fund various research projects, department head Dr. Kenneth Gowdy says.

The department has three other industrial robots which are used for research and for teaching students who will work with the sophisticated machines after graduation.

Texas A&M is the first Texas university to be included in IBM's joint studies programs which involve MIT, Stanford, and Carnegie Mellon and

several other leaders in high-technology research.

Gowdy said a key factor in Texas A&M's selection for the IBM robotics program was Jack Henry, assistant professor of engineering technology, who is on a leave of absence to work for IBM.

"Prof. Henry has been doing

some excellent work at IBM and will return to our department in June to work on research and return to teaching," Gowdy said.

Until Henry returns, other researchers in the department will become familiar with the IBM 7565 manufacturing system.

Among projects under consideration are a study of the practical uses and limitations of vision in manufacturing assembly operations, a comparison of system efficiency using different computer languages and a study of flexible manufacturing cells.

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