

Doctors hopeful after reattaching man's leg

By Tom Baer
staff writer

If Ron Childress walks again, he'll have his age and the skillful surgeons at Royal Oak's Beaumont Hospital to thank.

Childress is in "stable" condition in Beaumont's intensive care unit this week following doctors' efforts to reattach his leg. His left leg had been severed above the knee, and the right leg almost severed in an accident in a Troy wood lot last Friday on his 32nd birthday.

Childress, a Ferndale resident, was splitting logs for firewood in back of a factory at 525 E. Elmwood when he somehow fell into a motor-driven log splitter.

His right thumb was also severed in the accident.

Troy police arrived at the scene about 12:25 p.m., and Childress' unconscious body and the severed limbs were taken to Beaumont by Suburban Ambulance Co. personnel.

At Beaumont, two teams of surgeons worked simultaneously in a 4½-hour operation to reattach Childress' legs, using a technique called replantation.

The prognosis?

Impossible to give at this time, according to hospital officials.

"The right leg looks appreciably better than the left, and we have hopes for

it," Dr. Robert Lucas, the chief of surgical services at Beaumont, said at a press conference Tuesday. "It may take weeks, a week at least, before we know how things will go."

Childress' age could be an important factor if he recovers and the replantation is successful, Lucas said. "A more elderly type of patient probably could not have stood the trauma," the doctor said.

LUCAS CALLED the replantation "a very complicated procedure," but added that the operation was made easier by the cuts through the legs, which were "really quite clean."

A rod inserted through the length of the bone in both the stump and severed part was used to hold the two together, Lucas said, while major nerves and vessels were reattached.

The nerve repair could present a special problem, Lucas said.

"When the nerves are severed, they take a long period of time to grow back ... and the muscles can atrophy," Lucas said. "The extremity which has no feeling is very susceptible to trauma."

Doctors have had little experience with adult replantations in the lower extremities. But even if the operation is successful, "we're talking about years of rehabilitation," Lucas said.

"He's not going to get about like a normal 32-year-old," the doctor added.

"It's unrealistic to think that he will." Doctors made no attempt to reattach Childress' thumb because "a long segment of vessel was missing," Lucas said.

Asked the cost of the operation, Lucas responded, "I couldn't say." Obviously, it's very expensive. Six doctors worked on the surgery, he said.

The "double extremity" replantation was the first ever at Beaumont, according to Lucas, who added that surgeons at the University of Louisville were asked for advice.

"They're some of the best replantation people in the country," he said.

MUCH KNOWLEDGE of replantation techniques came from Communist China during the 1960s, Lucas said. "The principal interest in this country came out of articles about what they were doing in China," he said.

The chances for success with "upper extremity" replantations are good, Lucas said, "but it's hard to get numbers on lower extremities because so few have been attempted."

Meanwhile, Childress is "alert and aware" in Lucas' words. The patient, who is married, was taken off the respirator and was placed on a liquid diet, Lucas said.

Little information about the accident or the wood cutting operation on the site could be obtained.

Perceptron elects board member

Claron Swonger has been elected to the board of directors of Perceptron, Farmington Hills.

In his new position, Swonger will help provide technical direction for Perceptron, which supplies machine vision systems to durable goods manufacturers.

Swonger is director of the Intelligent Machine Technology Group at the non-profit Environmental Research Institute of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

He was previously vice president of research and development at Perceptron.

Prior to joining Perceptron, Swonger served as director of the Distributed Systems Division at Comshare, Inc. of Ann Arbor.

He has also served as vice president and general manager of Calspan Technology Products in Buffalo, N.Y., and as head of the computer systems department at Cornell Aeronautical Lab-

oratory (now Calspan Corp.), also in Buffalo.

While there, Swonger developed machine vision systems for the U.S. Air Force and other clients, starting in 1963.

A nationally recognized expert in the development of computer based systems for automatic image processing, Swonger holds patents in fingerprint identification, computer graphics and character recognition.

He is a member of the National Computer Graphics Association, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers.

Swonger holds a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from Tufts University and a master of science degree in electrical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



Claron Swonger



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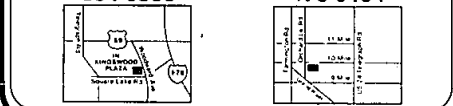
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