

Laws stall use of lifesaver

By LORIN LABARDEE

Sam Robbins' basement workshop at 109 N. Alice in Rochester is cluttered with the tools of his electronic genius.

There is a voltage regulator in one corner. Near the door is an oscilloscope. On a small desk rests a function generator.

EACH PIECE of equipment plays a different role in Robbins' current project—the development of an inexpensive, portable electrocardiograph (EKG) machine.

He has been working on the EKG machine for about four years and is near completion. It has been accepted for production and marketing by two nationally-known firms.

But Robbins may never see his machine in use in Michigan.

He has been told he is dying of an incurable blood disease—lupus hematos. His machine cannot be put to use in Michigan until a paramedic law is passed by the legislature.

Robbins is not the eccentric, dream-seeking inventor his wrinkled trousers and ruffled hair might suggest.

HE HOLDS more than 10 patents including one on the seatbelt interlock system, and one on the "memory seat" which adjusts itself to a driver's pre-set dimensions.

Robbins also has a patent on a "living cell seat." Pressure on the seat does not engage the inter-lock system unless it is by a live cell.

He has worked for the Fisher Body Co., the AC Sparkplug Co. and two years ago retired from the General Motors Tech Center in Warren.

Robbins was senior design engineer of research, production and safety. Since retiring from GM Robbins has devoted most of his time to the EKG machine.

Prior to studying electronics, Robbins spent two years in medical school from 1932 to 1934. Now he has gone back to medicine and its connection with electronics.

His bookshelf is a portrait of contrast. One row holds volume after volume of electronics manuals. The next shelf is a collection of medical texts.

THE EKG MACHINE Robbins has created measures a person's heart beat.

Electrodes are attached to the person's chest and transmit the heart beat to the machine. In most cases, the beat is relayed as a zigzagging line on graph paper.

Robbins' machine is designed for use in ambulances. It transmits the heart beat as beeping sounds over a loudspeaker.

The portable EKG unit is not a new invention. Others have been built and are in use.

But Robbins says his machine is better because it is much less expensive than the others.

Everything is far too over-engineered, these days, says Robbins with a candor unexpected of a former auto engineer.

PRESENTLY PORTABLE EKG units cost as much as \$2,500. Robbins estimates that his can be marketed for about \$250.

And marketing of the machine is not far off. A Chicago firm has already agreed to produce it while another firm has agreed to sell it to ambulances companies.

If Robbins' cost estimates hold true his machine will probably be a success just about everywhere except Michigan.

The machine's purpose in an ambulance is to give the attendant a readable picture of the person's heart beat so that the attendant can correct an erratic beat. To treat a patient's heart with intravenous injections and electric shock the attendant must have advanced medical training and be licensed under law.

Michigan does not have an advanced medical training or paramedic law at this time.

EIGHT OTHER STATES have such

a law, and experts in paramedicine say the laws are working out well.

The men of the St. Onge Ambulance Co. form one of the key groups from this area pushing for a Michigan paramedic law.

"We've handled almost every type of accident but we're not allowed to do what we need to," says Frank Bartlett, manager of St. Onge.

"I wish to . . . there was a bill through. It's just a matter of a few minutes, when a patient goes out, that you've got to bring him back."

Charles Robinson, an attendant with St. Onge, says there were three accident victims in recent weeks who needed intravenous injections.

None of the three received the injections because it would have been illegal.

If and when a paramedic law is passed Bartlett says there will be EKG machines in each of St. Onge's three ambulances "overnight."

BARTLETT USES the word "overnight" because Robbins' work on the machine is nearly finished. Now the waiting for the law begins.

Robbins may never see it passed. His doctor is the best judge of that.

Robbins is afflicted with lupus hematos. The disease is known as "the great masquerader." "It causes all sorts of problems," says Robbins.

The disease affects the collagen fibers in the body and is incurable. Little else is known about it. Doctors have arrested its progress in Robbins.

His wife, Jessie, a licensed practical nurse, says she believes her husband will die of a heart attack caused by lupus hematos.

ROBBINS HAS already ridden to Crittenton in St. Onge ambulances on at least fifteen separate occasions for severe chest pains.

On July 25, Robbins had one of his attacks. It took doctors at Crittenton Hospital one and a half hours to revive him, according to Mrs. Robbins.

Robbins realizes he's living on borrowed time.

He has given his doctor orders to cut off all life support machines if, during an attack, blood stops going to his brain for more than four minutes.

"I don't want to be a vegetable," he says with a bluntness that stuns.

"THERE'S NOTHING that can help me at all. I'm just getting as far along as I can so it might help somebody else."

The most needed addition to Robbins machine is the paramedic law.

The lack of the law aggravates and frustrates him, a situation that does not help his condition.

"Why should we sit back in the stone age when we've got the equipment?"

They're (legislators) talking about whose street's going to get paved, and they're letting the guy who's riding down it in an ambulance die."

IN MAY, Robbins, Frank St. Onge (owner of the ambulance firm), several area physicians and a representative from the Michigan Heart Association (MHA) were to meet with a state senator.

The meeting, says Robbins, was to acquaint the senator with the EKG unit and the need for a Michigan paramedic law.

The senator did not attend.

Robbins says he's never heard from the senator on why he failed to make the appointment.

"Delays like this senator thing make me so mad because they don't know what I put into it," says Robbins in disgust.

THE DELAYS MAY NOT continue much longer.

A paramedic bill has passed the Michigan House of Representatives and is on the general orders agenda for the Michigan Senate when it reconvenes Sept. 17.

Senate-watchers have given it a 100 percent chance of passage.

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Paramedic protection possible

By LORIN LABARDEE

A drunken motorist, crashes into a bridge abutment. He goes into severe shock.

When the rescue squad arrives, the driver's heart is not pumping but vibrating very erratically.

The victim requires shock treatments to stabilize his heartbeat.

If such an accident occurred in Southfield the driver might have a better chance of survival than in other Michigan communities.

THE REASON is that Southfield's Fire Department has one of the very few practicing paramedic units in Michigan.

As paramedic, the 19 men of the Southfield Life Support team, have the training to administer electric shock treatments.

But the Life Support men perform their jobs at great risk.

Because there is no paramedic law in Michigan Life Support members are highly vulnerable to malpractice suits.

Under a paramedic law, rescue teams administer shock treatments and give intravenous injections on a doctors orders.

Under current practice in Southfield and states with paramedic laws, a vic-

tim's heartbeat is transmitted from the ambulance to the hospital.

A doctor at the hospital reads the electrocardiogram (EKG) and prescribes the proper treatment to the attendant.

Although Southfield members have had the training, they are not licensed or sanctioned to perform the treatment by state law.

SOUTHFIELD'S WILLING to risk the chances to save these people's lives," said Southfield Fire Chief Donald Foote.

Foote estimates that the Life Support teams have saved over 70 lives since their inception in 1972.

Because of the malpractice risk, the City of Southfield carries insurance on Life Support members capable of covering claims up to \$1.3 million per year.

Nine members of Detroit's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) have paramedical training.

None of the nine members practice because there is no law, said Chief Richard Dole, asst. supt. of EMS.

Dole said he is anxious to see paramedic legislation passed. "The practice could make the difference between saving a few lives and saving many."

Dole, Foote and others interested in paramedicine may not have long to wait.

House Bill No. 5732 is the piece of legislation they are watching now.

THAT BILL, which passed the Michigan House of Representatives May 3, provides for advanced medical training and licensing of paramedics in Michigan.

The bill was reported out of the Senate appropriations committee on July 11 and appeared on the agenda of the full Senate July 12.

However, the Senate recessed July 13, before action could be taken on the bill.

It is on the general orders agenda for the Senate's reconvening session Sept. 17.

State Representative Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park), who has continually pushed the bill, said he is sure it will pass the Senate.

Wayne McKenna, a member of the Michigan Medical Emergency Services Council, was more cautious about the bill.

"There is no heavy lobby against it but there are some private interests who are opposing it," he said.

Whether those private interests win out on House Bill No. 5732 will best be known after Sept. 17.

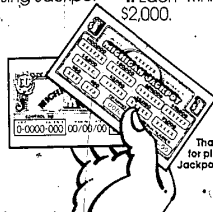
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OCC is still registering

FARMINGTON HILLS — Students who missed the 1974 fall session mail registration at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College are still able to register Thursday, Sept. 5, according to an alphabetical schedule by last name.

Students who need counseling assistance in selecting their courses before registration should go to the counseling center in "M" building, where counselors are willing to help on a first come, first serve basis from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

For more information contact Don Nichols, 476-9400, ext. 226.

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