

Patient helps others learn

BY SHERRY KAHAN

Jim Currie of Livonia has had all kinds of physical problems and setbacks in his life. But none of them has been enough to keep him from reporting to the speech clinic in St. Mary Hospital when he is needed.

Currie had his larynx removed 15 years ago, and since then hasn't been able to speak.

But after many hours of hard and frustrating work he learned to communicate with what is called esophageal

speech. He learned it so well that he is occasionally asked to help St. Mary patients who are beginning to learn this process.

Under direction of Dale Freels, head of the speech and language department, Currie has been encouraging Arthur Gled of Farmington to learn the swallow method of talking.

"AFTER A LARYNGECTOMY, a patient no longer breathes through his nose and mouth," said Freels. "When the larynx was removed, the windpipe was directed toward the hole in his throat. This is the way he breathes."

"Normally he would use the larynx as a sound source. Without it the patient must use the esophageal method to speak. He takes air into his mouth and forces it into his stomach."

The reason he does this is to build up pressure to make an air pocket, Freels stated. Then he belches up the air which produces a sound which can be articulated into a word.

"It is very hard to learn," said Freels. "We can give a patient a glass of water or pop to try to build up the pressure to make a belch. But for him belching is a continual process if he is to develop speech."

FREELS EXPLAINED that the patient starts with a sound like "ah." Then he goes to small one-syllable words like one, two, pie etc. and after that bi-syllable words and then sentences.

"We give them instruction here in the office, then they practice at home," he said. "It takes patience to perfect this especially with a family around. It is important the family understand and become involved in what he is doing."

For Currie the process was very discouraging. "I kept at it because I was gassy," he said in his new voice. "I had a pretty big job and if I couldn't talk I was out."

Currie, who quickly indicated his interest in a good joke said he could only communicate by notes when he returned to work after his operation. He thought it pretty funny when his questions would also be answered by note.

"And I'm not deaf," he laughed.

SPEECH FOR THOSE with laryngectomy is a series of belches modified into words, Freels pointed out. "The patient cannot speak very fast until he gets the belches perfected into a kind of rhythm," he said. "He will say a few words, inject more air and say a few more."

"For many it is frustrating to lose their voice. But it is something they have to accept. We have Currie come in to give confidence to new patients and to be a sort of an example of what they will be able to do."

Currie also makes use of an artificial larynx, which he holds next to his throat. Run on batteries, this instrument supplements esophageal speech when the patient becomes tired. It gives volume to his words.

It allows for faster speech because speaking softly, the user would not have to inject air so often.

"I LIKE THE WORK very much," said Freels, who came to St. Mary in August of 1973.

"There are so many varieties of speech disorders with which the department works. It is a rewarding experience to help people gain or regain their speech."

The speech center operates under



Laryngectomy patients get instruction in swallow method of talking

the umbrella of rehabilitation medicine which includes speech pathology, plus physical and occupational therapy. The director of the department is Terry Heaton.

Besides working with patients who have lost their larynxes, the speech clinic provides broad-based therapeutic help to people with many communication disabilities.

FOR INDIVIDUALS who have delayed or disordered language prob-

lems, clinic provides diagnosis evaluation and therapy.

Diagnostic treatment is also available for such problems as articulation disorders, voice disorders, stuttering and aphasia.

Speech reading, auditory training and counseling are also available at the clinic for hard-of-hearing and deaf children and adults.

The clinic is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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Swallow This

by Don Bosco

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