

Scientists Seek To Determine When Life Leaves The Body

ANN ARBOR
When does life leave the body?

This question, once primarily in the minds of theologians and philosophers, has become increasingly important to physicians in recent years with the advent of medical techniques which can support the life functions of persons who are "clinically dead."

At the University of Michigan Medical Center, a special three-man central nervous system committee has been established to determine when and whether a person, whose life functions are being supported by artificial means, is officially dead.

"Our job is to determine when brain death has occurred," explains Dr. Kenneth R. Magee, professor of neurology and a member of the committee. The committee's determinations are required in the cases of potential organ transplant donors, whose life functions are artificially supported until the time of transplant operations, he adds.

In addition to Dr. Magee, Dr. Kenneth A. Kooi, professor of electroencephalography, and Dr. Edgar A. Kahn, professor of neurosurgery, are members of the committee. Each specialist evaluates the

patient's medical record and clinical signs separately to determine whether he has any chance of recovery.

THE POTENTIAL organ donor's condition must be "irreversible," Dr. Magee explains. "There must be absolutely no chance that the individual could regain consciousness, breathe again, or maintain his blood pressure or heart beat without medication."

If any member of the committee finds "the slightest evidence" that the patient may recover, the committee votes any transplant operation which might be performed with the patient's organs, Dr. Magee says. One veto cancels the transplant.

The Committee is an advisory body to transplant surgeons who must have definite evidence of brain death before a transplant can be performed, Dr. Magee explains. The committee has no responsibility of care for the potential organ donor, and transplant surgeons, in turn, do not participate in the determination of death.

The "most stringent criteria" known to medical science are employed in determining brain death in potential organ donors, Dr. Magee says.

A thorough examination of the patient's medical record and his physical condition must reveal no self-supported vital signs, Dr. Magee explains. In addition, the potential donor must be completely comatose, with no reflex action or muscle rigidity. He must have no response to painful stimulation.

These indicators, in addition to other carefully determined factors, help the committee members determine whether organs from the potential donor may be transplanted.

THE FINAL test of brain death is a pair of electroencephalograph (EEG) readings taken 24 hours apart by the committee's electroencephalographer, Dr. Kooi. The EEG measures the electrical

activity of the brain which directs body functions, he explains. A "flat" EEG reading indicates that there is no electrical activity in the brain, Dr. Kooi says. This information, coupled with a completely negative medical and surgical evaluation indicates that the brain is dead.

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PHYSICAL FITNESS TESTS -- Farmington youngsters test their physical fitness by swinging Tarzan-style across the Rouge River in City Park at Power and Shiawassee. The group make it from bank to bank; the weak bathe mid-stream. Shown making the trip are Wendy Borchard of 31741 Lamar, Farmington, Darlene Merna of 31911 Leefield and Chris Gearin of 31841 Lamar (right). (Evert photo)

Harris Hits McDonald On Fund Bill Vote

Democratic congressional candidate Fred L. Harris has charged that the vote by U.S. Rep Jack McDonald in the 19th district to support President Nixon's veto of the independent offices fund bill will hurt local communities facing flooding and sewer problems.

Harris made his remarks as he met with Democratic candidates for township, local, county and legislative offices in Waterford Township.

Harris called the meeting with the local candidates to discuss joint problems and to work out joint approaches to the needs of the 19th District. He said that as an elected congressman he would give top priority to developing a close relationship with local officials.

"Unlike the present congressman, I would make it clear that the full power of the congressional office would be used in those areas where the federal government can help solve the problems faced by local communities," Harris said.

He said that McDonald's vote will mean probably cutbacks in basic water and sewer grants (\$50 million) housing for the elderly (\$10 million), and re-

building of cities (\$350 million) and veterans medical care (\$106 million).

"How can the president and the congressman from the 19th,

take money away from veterans' medical care after the recent expose of the shocking conditions in hospitals serving injured servicemen?" Harris asked.

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