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# News

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\*\*\*Patient builds harpsichord in  
hospital room

DALLAS--Leighton Paul Clark has been spending many hours night and day working in his small room building a custom harpsichord. Spending his time this way is nothing new for Leighton. But it came as somewhat of a shock to both the patients and the medical personnel in the General Clinical Research Center at The University of Texas Health Science Center when the Denton, Texas resident moved the partially built instrument into his hospital room.

Clark is a full-time custom builder of harpsichords. And the former voice major from Oberlin College is himself a patient at the GCRC, a miniature hospital at the center, dedicated to human research and supported by the Division of Research Resources at the National Institutes of Health. Clark, who has had diabetes almost 18 years and has been on a conventional program of insulin administered by injection on a twice daily basis, has been spending three weeks in the GCRC. He is a new patient in a study with Dr. Philip Raskin, associate professor of internal medicine. Raskin has been working with a large group of patients, several of whom will celebrate their third anniversaries on the insulin pump this summer.

Treatment for diabetes mellitus by continuous subcutaneous insulin infusion, as the pump program is called, uses a small battery operated insulin pump. Clark's pump, about the size of a pack of cigarettes, is attached to his belt and connected to a thin nylon tube with a needle on the end. The needle is inserted under the skin near the waist. The insulin flows through the tubing in individually programmed pulses throughout the day or night, mimicking the body's own distribution of insulin. This necessary hormone has an important role in regulating the carbohydrate, lipid and amino acid metabolism of the body. There is also a button to push for an extra "boost" of insulin when it is needed.

(over)



Clark says he has enjoyed his experience in the GCRC. Of course, keeping busy with something he likes to do helped a lot. And he says it's something he would have done, anyway.

"I am well aware of the seriousness of my condition and the potential health problems I face. Medically, coming in to get on the pump would be worth it whether I had to miss work or not.

"I'd like to live to be at least 100 years old like my grandfather who just had his birthday. So if I can come in and work at the same time, why not?"

When the musician first came into the GCRC to get his pump, he immediately asked if he could bring his harpsichord.

"Goodness, how big is it?" the nurses asked.

Actually, size was not a problem. The custom-built instrument weighs between 80 and 90 pounds and was designed to be portable. Clark and a friend can carry it between them, and it easily fit into a nearby elevator at the medical school.

The two movers were stopped many times by curious on-lookers who wanted to know what it was they were moving. Clark says his hat's off, though, to the cool medical student who stepped into the overcrowded space and calmly asked, "What's a harpsichord doing in this elevator?"

The instrument, commissioned by a Dallas man for his home, is midnight blue and black with black keys and natural wood legs. A stripe of gold leaf is used for accent. The sounding board is decorated in the Flemish style with handpainted flowers, birds and insects by a North Texas State University art graduate, Roger Blythe of Fort Worth, who works with Clark on a contractual basis. The two have researched the harpsichord and the periods of its popularity so that the design and decorative effects will be appropriate to the instrument. During his regular working hours Blythe is a cake decorator for a local food chain.

Charles' wife Debora Dunn Clark is also an Oberlin graduate in music. Besides completing her graduate studies at North Texas this spring, she has been working since March as choirmaster at Fort Worth's Trinity Episcopal Church. It was often her pieces on the harpsichord that drew patients, nurses and doctors outside the ninth floor room so they could listen to the impromptu concerts, which also serve as a "testing." In addition, she helped with the finishing of the instrument and judging the tonal qualities.

"I'm losing money on this one," said Clark, who began building and maintaining harpsichords on a full-time basis about a year ago. "I just can't work as efficiently here as well as I can at home--and also the first few days I was tied up almost all the time with giving blood and taking tests. But I'm not in it for the money, anyway, really. Custom building and taking care of harpsichords is not only my profession but a love of mine. I don't make much money at it. In fact, I'm not sure I make any money at it."

(more)



Raskin says he is delighted that Clark was able to bring the harpsichord to the GCRC. "It's healthy for the patients to have something productive to do. GCRC patients have to spend a large amount of their time here. Some stay a couple of weeks and others have to stay as long as seven or eight."

One of the nurses commented that "it's good for the other patients, too. The music has been lovely and it's been fun to watch Leighton's progress."

Carol Poindexter, R.N., research nurse supervisor in the unit, said that patients are always encouraged to bring things they can do, such as work from the office, or handwork, games or books. Besides the harpsichord project some of the more unusual projects of GCRC patients over the years have included one woman's making her daughter's new wardrobe for school, an upholsterer's converting scraps from her business into purses that she sold, a blind man's learning macrame and then turning out pieces for sale during his next visit and an amateur organist and a professional symphony oboist keeping their playing skills up by practicing on their instruments in their rooms.

Children, said Poindexter, present more problems than adults. "We encourage the children, who are usually at least five or six years old, to bring their toys, puzzles and games from home. We also try to play card games with them whenever we're not too busy, and encourage them to play together when there are more than one in and their parents can't be with them.

"However, one time we did have a group that got a little too creative. We heard a commotion from the visiting room and went to check. The kids were amusing themselves by dropping water balloons on people below from the seventh Floor."

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Pictures available on request.