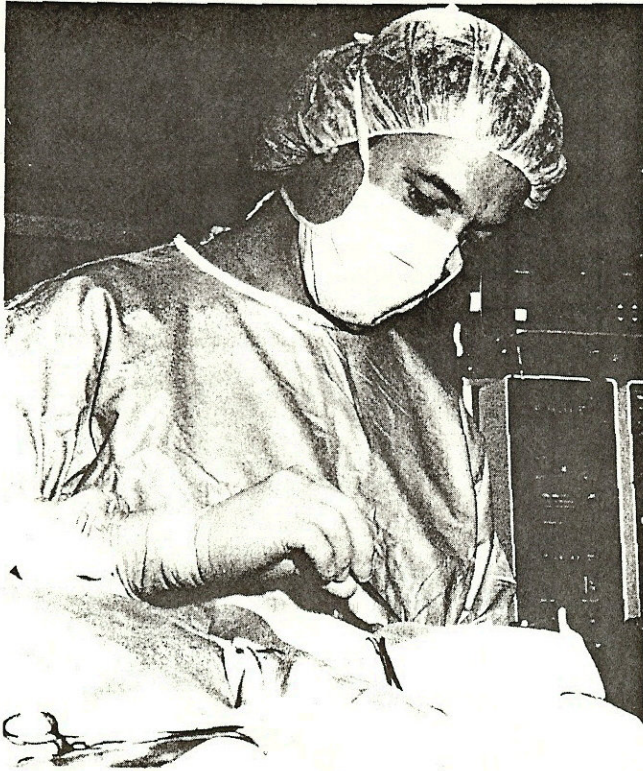


VA SURGEON HELPS IN SIAMESE TWINS OPERATION



Dr. Craig Dufresne, an expert in craniofacial reconstruction, during a routine surgical procedure at Baltimore VAMC.

A Baltimore VA physician was one of the main surgeons involved with the separation of the Siamese twins Benjamin and Patrick Bender of Ulm, West Germany. In what was considered a dazzling success, the twins were separated in a day-long operation at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Dr. Craig Dufresne, chief of plastic surgery at Baltimore VAMC, performed the delicate plastic surgery for the separated twins, as part of his duties on the faculty of Johns Hopkins Medical School. He was responsible for coordinating their skin care and subsequent reconstructive surgery.

Five months before the operation, Dufresne flew to Germany to assess the feasibility of certain surgical procedures. Although the twins had been connected by skin, skull and blood vessels from the back of their necks to the top of

their heads, they had separate brains. Dufresne was faced with the problem of creating additional skin to cover the scalps after the operation.

He reasoned that small silicone balloons could be inserted under their scalps. By injecting these balloons ever so slowly with a saline solution, skin would expand and grow to cover the area much like a pregnant woman's skin expands.

Once Dufresne inserted the expanders, the process was carefully controlled and monitored for three months by pediatricians in Germany.

Since the separation, the twins have continued to gain strength and make a normal neurological recovery.

In addition to his position at the VA medical center, Dufresne is assistant professor of plastic surgery at Johns Hopkins University and

one of approximately 200 people in the world expert in craniofacial reconstruction. Serving as director of the Johns Hopkins Facial Rehabilitation Center at Baltimore's Childrens Hospital offers him the intellectual challenge to explore new frontiers and concepts.

His patients are from as far away as Bangkok and as close as the Eastern Shore. But Dufresne is quick to point out that the problems today are getting too complex for any one person and solutions require a multi-disciplinary approach.

"It's not like it used to be," Dufresne said. "Today's doctor has to know about other fields — we need to keep expanding our vision in order to give patients up-to-date care."

Facial reconstruction for people suffering from cancer, motor vehicle accidents and gun shot wounds require the input of bio-engineering and its highly sophisticated equipment and new materials.

Dufresne received his M.D. from Columbia University and part of his training at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. □

Cover photo by Ellen Verdon shows patient Andrew Duwall being visited by volunteer Sam Kirkland, at the Washington, D.C., VAMC.

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