

Facility Offers Unique Combination Of Specialists in Brain Diseases

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"Because we see a large number of patients suffering from these disorders," Dr. Hanley says, "our staff has become very skilled at treating them. This doesn't mean that our doctors and nurses are better than those at other institutions, but it does mean that they have more experience in this specialty and are well trained to react to these problems quickly. We have sufficient staff to dedicate to this type of patient care around the clock."

The NCCU expects to treat some 800 patients a year in the new unit. Previously, 400 patients a year were seen in the old, four-bed unit.

Among the other conditions treated in the NCCU is Guillain-Barre syndrome, a paralyzing disorder usually triggered by a severe reaction to a viral illness. In GBS, antibodies that are part of the patient's immune defense system attack the fiber sheath that insulates nerve cells. This usually leads to a complete paralysis of the muscles involved in functions such as breathing, swallowing, and talking.

Successful treatment of GBS, developed at Hopkins, removes the attacking antibodies from the blood. The treatment, called plasmapheresis, is given in the NCCU, while specialists support muscular function and protect the brain.

According to Dr. Hanley, the Hopkins NCCU has been the site of successful investigations into the patterns and causes of neurological diseases that damage the brain and spinal cord. Its specialists have evaluated several new treatments suggested by research here and elsewhere.

"The educational value of the patient care in this unit is very high," notes Dr. Hanley, "both for the profession in gen-



Daniel F. Hanley, director of the Neurosciences Critical Care Unit, and Judith "Ski" Lower, head nurse on NCCU, display some of the facilities in the unit, created for the treatment of life-threatening brain diseases.

eral and the nurses and physicians who train here." For example, half of the registered nurses in the NCCU have earned national certification as specialists in neuroscience critical care, a rate far higher than the average in other medical centers or community hospitals. The unit is the site of ongoing educational programs for physicians and nurses from other communities.