

MORE THAN A NURSE,

LESS THAN A DOCTOR...

At Duke University Medical Center,
four ex-Navy medical corpsmen train for a new career
that promises better care to the sick

THERE IS A SHORTAGE of doctors, and it's getting worse. With the demand for medical care swelling and treatment itself growing more complex daily, the supply of physicians cannot keep up with the need for their skills. Although plans are under way to build more medical schools and expand existing ones, the experts figure it takes almost ten years from the time a medical student drops into one end of the funnel and a practicing physician emerges from the other. Sick people can't wait that long.

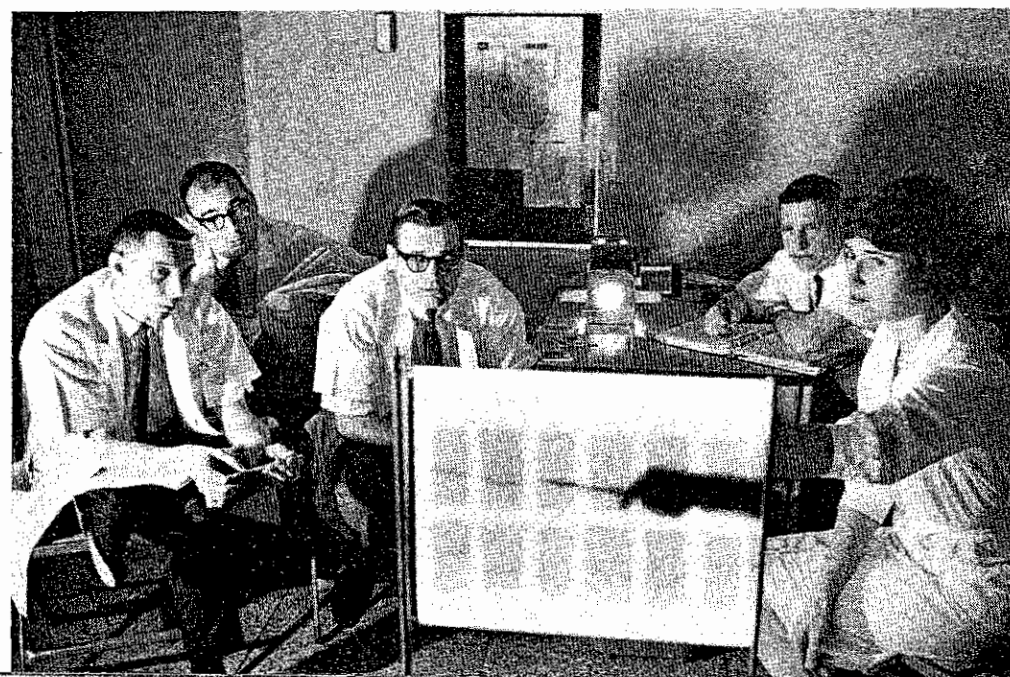
Last year, Dr. Eugene Anson Stead, chairman of the department of medicine at Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, N.C., took on the problem. "If we can't multiply the number of physicians," reasoned the slow-spoken, 58-year-old educator, "then maybe we can stretch their effectiveness by giving them extra arms and legs."

That thought led to the recruitment of four young men to be trained at Duke for a unique career as physician's assistants. The four—Victor Germino, Donald Guffey, Richard Scheele, all 26, and Kenneth Ferrell, 21—share a common bond. All are married, all have served a hitch in the Navy as medical corpsmen, all are dedicated to medicine.

Their intense, two-year, on-the-job training stint—halfway completed—includes 140 hours of nursing instruction, 60 hours of anatomy and physiology, 60 hours of pharmacology, 100 hours of animal surgery, and 90 hours of electronics theory and troubleshooting. When they graduate next June, they will work in hospitals or for medical groups. Hopefully, they will take over the time-consuming technical chores now performed by doctors and so leave the medical men free to treat more patients.

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Nursing instructor Kathleen Andreoli interprets electrocardiograph (EKG) recordings to the four physician's assistants (from left to right) Don Guffey, Vic Germino, Dick Scheele and Ken Ferrell.



Distorted by the fisheye lens of the camera, Vic Germino, wearing oxygen helmet, prepares to leave hyperbaric chamber. Vic has just made a 90-minute "dive" with a patient. Oxygen is fed into the chamber until the pressure is the equivalent of 225 feet below sea level. The extra oxygen destroys bacteria that are invading the patient's bloodstream. Vic works as one of the "diving" team.

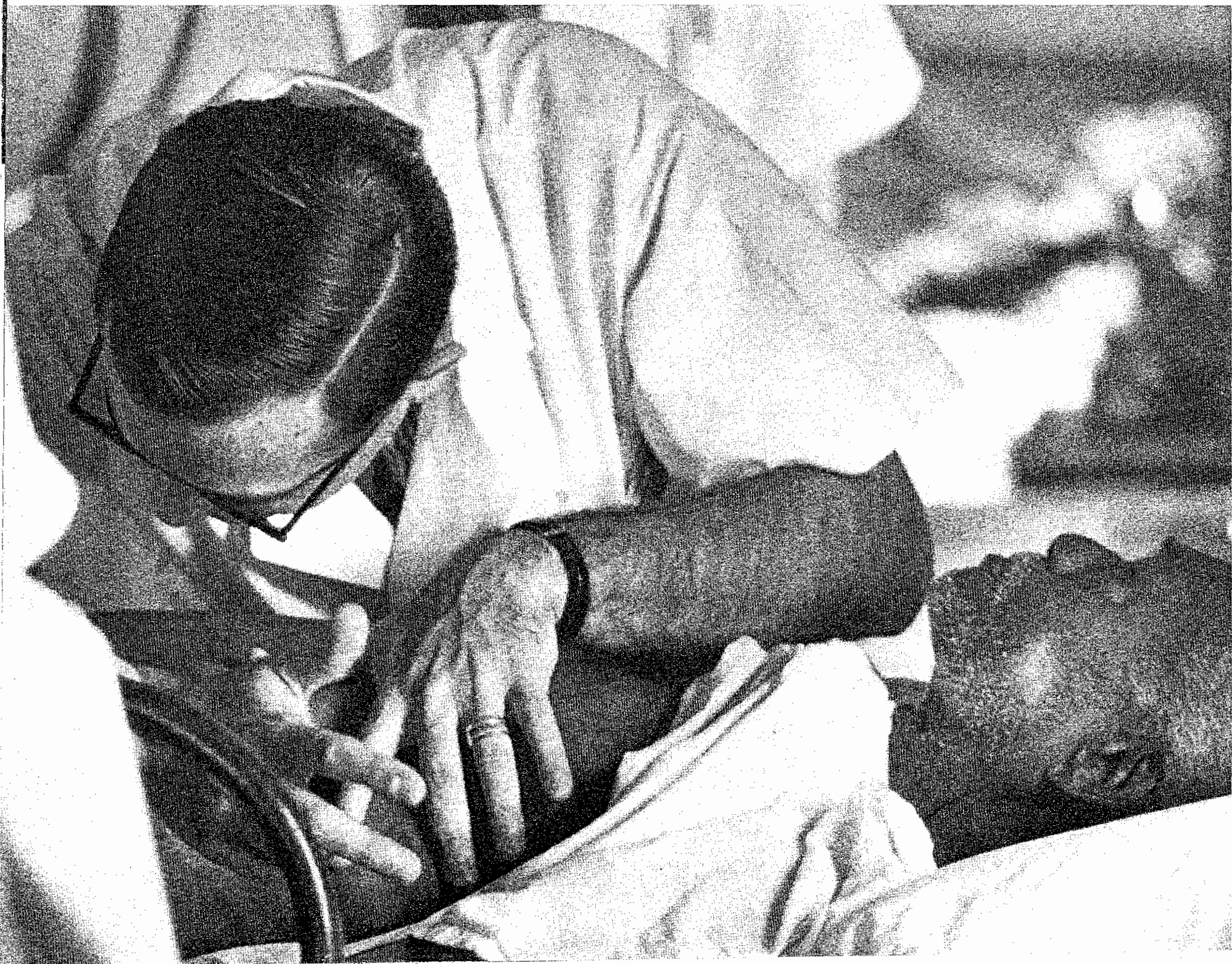
A coronary emergency spurs the team into action

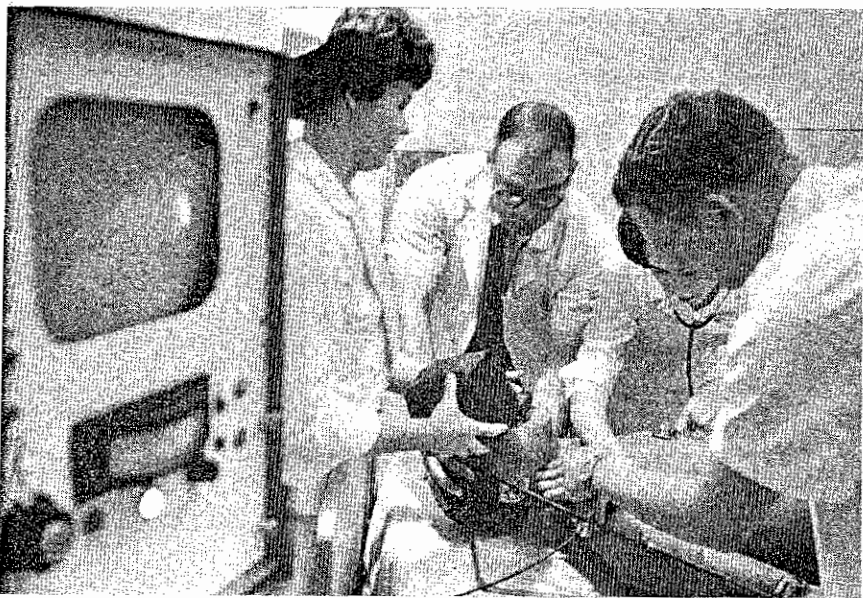
The coronary-care unit at Duke allows one nurse to keep a round-the-clock vigil over five acutely ill heart patients who are bedded in individual rooms. A TV camera suspended from the ceiling of each room tells the nurse what is happening via a monitor perched over her desk (right). Each patient's pulse, heartbeat and EKG are visible on a screen below the monitor. If a patient's heart beats crazily out of rhythm—a bell rings, and a red light flashes on the monitor. Quickly, the nurse summons the treatment team, supervised by Dr. Andrew Wallace, director of the unit. The four trainees drill constantly to learn their team duties letter-perfect.



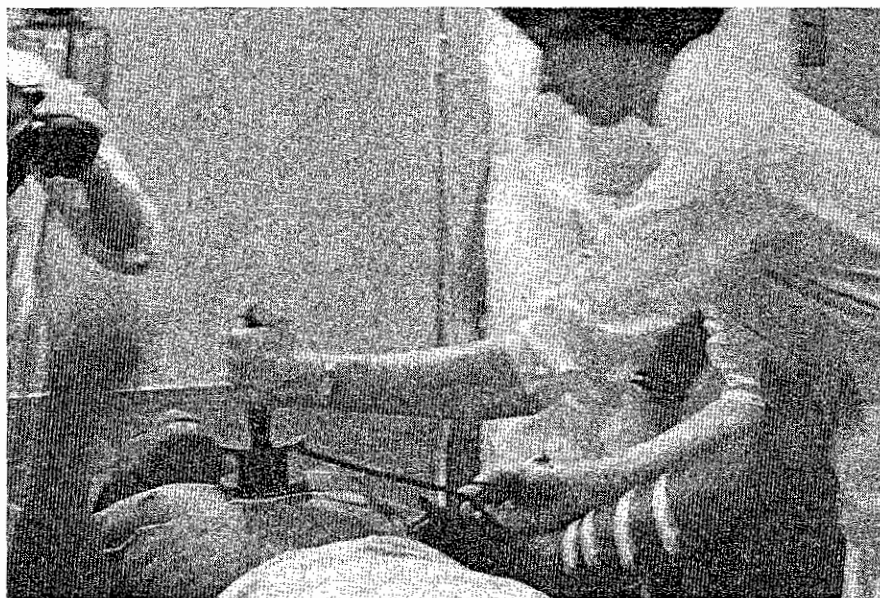
Don Guffey and Nurse Sue Durrett check monitors as a simulated "red alert" signals the emergency team into action.

As he makes "rounds" at nearby Lincoln Hospital with physician in charge, Dick Scheele examines an 87-year-old man who has heart failure.

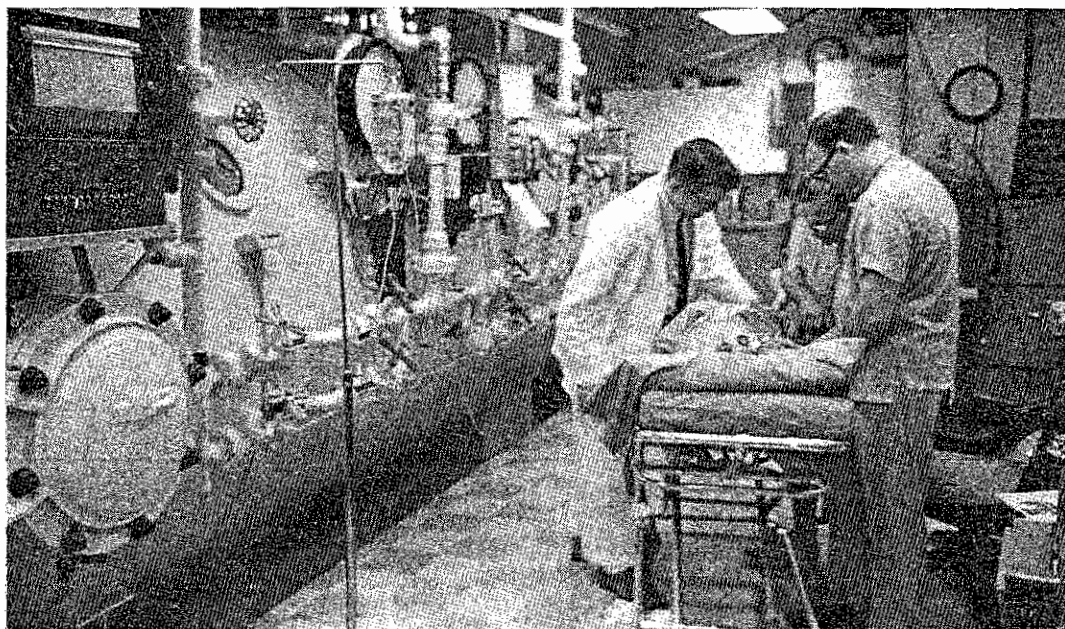




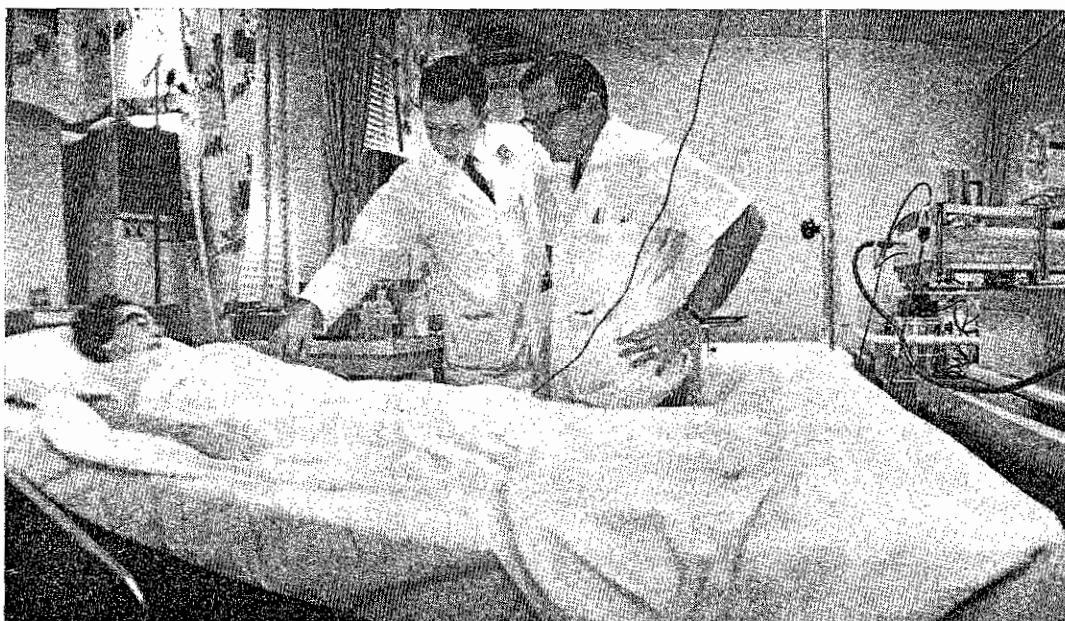
The team at work: Vic Germino, center, helps feed oxygen to the patient, while Ken Ferrell checks on his condition.



At Dr. Wallace's command, Nurse Linda Nystrom applies "shockers," and pulse of electricity stops heart momentarily, then lets it resume normal beat.



Outside hyperbaric chamber, Dick and Vic help ready patient for "dive." Below, technician Stephen Joyner, left, tells Dick how the life-sustaining artificial kidney works. Patient Ruby Pacetti is getting her 28th treatment.



The trainees must learn the art and skills of medicine

Those in charge of the physician's-assistants program at Duke are already selecting candidates for a second, expanded class of recruits. The next time, as many as 15 may be trained. Limited facilities, not lack of applicants or lack of demand for graduates, hold the number down. "Actually," says Dr. Stead, "we easily can find jobs for that many right here at the Center." Each of the present four men has received job offers from hospitals and doctors in group practice. Wisely, none is committing himself until closer to graduation.

Since such jobs have no precedent, salaries are open. The guess is that physician's assistants may earn from \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year to start. The potential for the future is limited only by the individual's ability and ambition. During training, each man gets paid \$200 a month as recognition that his on-the-job education already has a built-in service factor of value to patient and hospital. Except for a high-school diploma, requirements for recruits are flexible. The present four are ex-corpsmen, and it's likely in the future that many will come from those ranks—primarily because corpsmen have some medical training and enough exposure to medicine to test their desire for that kind of life. Since Duke wants career-minded people, interest and motivation weigh more in the individual's selection than other factors. The program aims not to create quickie doctors but to ease the manpower shortage with assistants possessing technical skill plus a basic medical understanding.

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