

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-4

THE BALTIMORE SUN
29 May 1981

Doctor who treated Reagan says, in book, that Brezhnev's health is poor

Washington (KNT)—Dr. William Knaus was running the intensive care unit at George Washington University Medical Center the day President Reagan walked in struggling with "air hunger" because of a bullet wound in his chest.

A short time before he treated the 70-year-old president, Dr. Knaus had sent a book to his publisher, Everest House, outlining the most accurate data available regarding the health of Leonid I. Brezhnev, the 74-year-old president of the Soviet Union.

Bullet hole and all, Mr. Reagan is far better off than his Soviet counterpart, Dr. Knaus said in an interview.

"He's just in great shape for a 70-year-old," Dr. Knaus said of Mr. Reagan. "He had a prostate operation a few years ago and wears one contact [lens], and everything else is good as new," said Dr. Knaus, who had access to Mr. Reagan's records and results of the hundreds of high-technology medical tests that were part of the president's treatment.

Dr. Knaus's data about Mr. Brezhnev comes from Central Intelligence Agency assessments, talks with several high-ranking Soviet medical experts and personal observation of the Soviet leader. In his book, "Inside Russian Medicine," Dr. Knaus described Mr. Brezhnev's health:

"The left side of his body is weak and his smile crooked, the obvious result of a stroke. This has also caused most of his problems with his speech, but compounding it is a severe degenerative hearing loss.

"The 74-year-old leader has also had two serious heart attacks, one of which left him with heart block, a disruption in the heart's normal rhythm. . . .

"Both times Brezhnev was given an electronic pacemaker."

Today, said Dr. Knaus in an interview, Soviet doctors talk freely about the

chronic bronchitis caused by Mr. Brezhnev's heavy cigarette smoking, although he has since quit. The Soviet leader also is troubled by angina pains because his heart has been weakened and he can walk only a short distance at a time.

Mr. Brezhnev also takes special medication produced outside the Soviet Union to reduce his heart's need for oxygen. This reduces the number of angina attacks, one Soviet surgeon told Dr. Knaus.

"During a 1979 state dinner with French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, the Soviet menu made it possible for Brezhnev to use only a spoon for eating," writes Dr. Knaus. "Western officials meeting with [the Soviet president] report his attention span is about an hour. At times he seems disoriented."

Mr. Brezhnev gets far better care than ordinary citizens do, according to Dr. Knaus, whose book is a sweeping condemnation of the Soviet medical system.

The Soviet president's pacemaker, for example, was imported, as were the angina drugs.

Similarly, when one of the Soviet Union's most important scientists, Mstislav Keldysh, developed a deadly plaque condition in the arteries of his legs, Dr. Michael DeBakey was flown in from Houston to perform surgery.

One American expert recalled later, "The problem was that both [Dr. Boris] Petrov and [Dr. Alexander] Vishnevsky [the leading Soviet surgeons in that specialty] had recently lost patients after similar operations. Both of them were reluctant to operate on someone of Keldysh's prominence and possibly fail."

Dr. Knaus predicted that "the Russians are just going to hate my book. I have nothing good to say about their system, and they were usually very cooperative

when I asked for favors."

Dr. Knaus's book even takes a shot at the Dannon yogurt commercials that have conveyed the impression that many Soviet Georgian citizens live to be incredibly old.

"In reality," writes Dr. Knaus, "the secrets of the Soviet centenarians are, like American commercials, a mixture of fact, legend and unchallenged exaggeration."

Dr. Knaus acknowledges that there are many Soviets more than 100 years old, but he adds that there are a lot of Americans over a century old, too. In 1978 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated there were 11,992 Americans over 100. The Institute of Gerontology, in Kiev, estimates there are 20,000 Soviets that old.

Most of the Soviet centenarians live in Azerbaijan, Georgia and in the Caucasus Mountains. Dr. Knaus found that one U.S. expert, Alexander Leaf of Harvard, who spent years studying the Georgians and publicizing their longevity, now is disillusioned.

Dr. Knaus said Dr. Leaf concluded after writing a book called "Youth in Old Age," which extolled the elderly long-lifers: "I was gullible then. I realize now that the aging data in the Soviet Union can't be taken at face value.

Dr. Leaf complained, for example, that, despite the fact that one long-lifer, Shirali Mislumov, is long dead, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* prints his picture each year along with an article about his secrets for a long life. "The last time [*Pravda* ran the false story] he was 170," Dr. Leaf noted.

The real secret, he found, is that the old-timers fib about their age when interviewed because they want to please their visitors. Studies now indicate that the people claiming extreme old age are actually 20 to 40 years younger than they say.