

# People

weekly


IN

# MEDICS



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**SPACE DOCTOR  
CHARLES BERRY NOW  
FIGHTS MORE  
DOWN-TO-EARTH  
AFFLICTIONS**



Still a NASA consultant, Dr. Charles Berry tucks 6'3" aeromedical technician Larry Busch into a space shuttle rescue sphere. It will be used, for example, to transfer a sick crew member to a spacecraft for return to earth for treatment.

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## Space medicine taught him, says Berry, that 'man could adapt'

It sounds foolish now, but Dr. Charles Berry remembers the early 1960s when powerful scientists and politicians argued against sending men into space. "There were all sorts of wild theories about zero gravity," says Berry, who was then chief medical officer for NASA. "Some people said the astronauts' hearts would explode, or that their blood pressure would fall to nothing. Some said they would never be able to urinate, and others said they'd never be able to stop urinating. I had a theory that man could adapt."

Having been proved right once, Dr. Berry took on a new challenge last July: preventive medicine. As medical director of the Houstonian, an 18-acre, \$30 million center for businessmen in the Texas city, Berry will devise a program for keeping middle-aged executives healthy. "The job with the astronauts," he says, "was to keep them fit—not to let them get sick. There's no reason why we can't do the same thing for others."

Just as he used to prescribe potassium to stop the irregular heartbeats

some astronauts experienced in space, Berry will advise his patients on diet, weight, exercise and ways to cope with stress. "I believe that 70 percent of the causes of death can be prevented or delayed or that early detection can change the outcome," the doctor says.

Berry may use the word "sick," but he prefers "preventive medicine failure." When a patient comes to him—most of them presumably will be sent by their companies—Dr. Berry and his staff will draw up "an exact risk chart. We'll be able to tell him he stands a certain percentage chance of coming down with heart disease, cancer or whatever. Then we'll tell him how to change those percentages."

The Houstonian center is funded by a private foundation which has some 90 corporate members. Staunchly devoted to free enterprise, the foundation contends that reducing executive time lost to illness would be a significant help to the economy.

In his own life, Berry is an example (if not a rebuke) to paunchy vice-presidents. Six feet, 182 pounds, the 54-year-old doctor runs three miles every morning, doesn't smoke and drinks only an occasional vodka gimlet. He

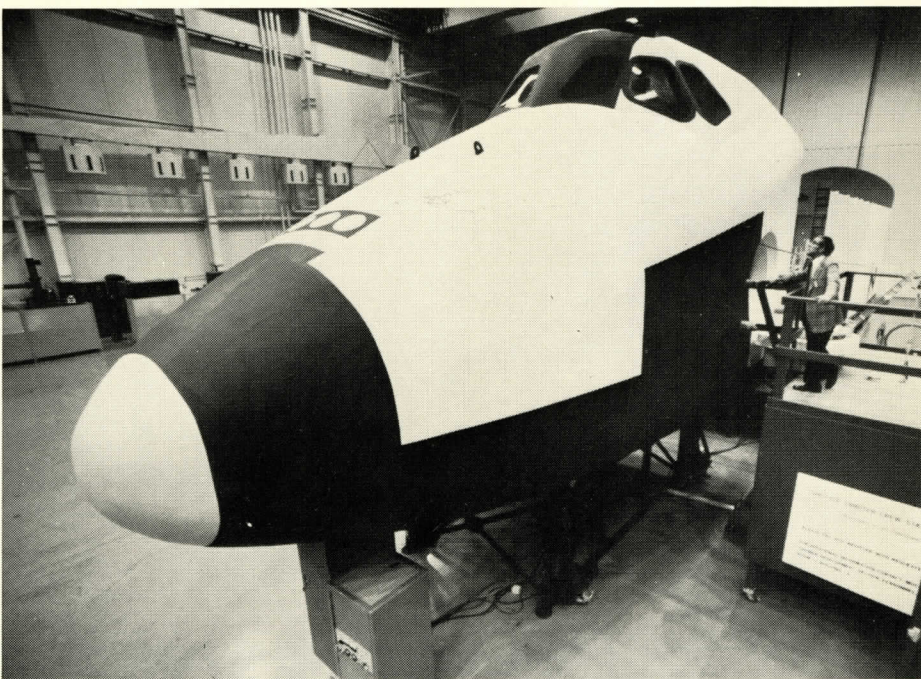
has been married since 1944 to his high school sweetheart, Del. They have two married daughters and a doctor son who works as a NASA flight surgeon (treating some of the same astronauts his father did). Last year, using the diaphragm-squeezing Heimlich hug, Berry saved the life of his elder daughter, Charlene, 28, when she choked on a piece of steak. He later demonstrated the technique on the Houston TV news show to which he contributes a medical commentary three times a week.

Born in Arkansas, the son of a butcher, Berry grew up in Indio, Calif., graduated from the University of California and its medical school, then took a master's in public health at Harvard. He spent a decade as an Air Force doctor, rising to lieutenant colonel before retiring to work with NASA as a civilian. He left the space program in 1974 when the manned exploration program slowed down, but still consults on potential medical problems with the space shuttle.

The drama of his years with the astronauts will be hard to match, but Berry thinks of the preventive medicine center as a kind of exploration. "It is exciting," he says, "to be on a new frontier again." KENT DEMARET



Photographs by Michael Anthony Salas



Dr. Berry relishes the company of his granddaughter Courtney, 3, while wife Del holds grandson Jaybo, 1½.

In NASA's Shuttle Training Building, Berry inspects a mock-up of the space shuttle, which will go into orbit in the 1980s.