



BAYLOR CONNECTIONS

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Multidisciplinary Team of Alumni Separates Twins

This year's holiday season was extra special for the Turner family: The celebration included baby daughters Iesha and Tiesha. Conjoined at birth, the twins underwent a successful and historic separation at Texas Children's Hospital, last June.

William Pokorny, M.D., '68, a cardiovascular surgeon and a Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine, and Michael Nihill, M.D., an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor and a Baylor-trained cardiologist, headed the medical team involved in the twins' care, treatment and separation.

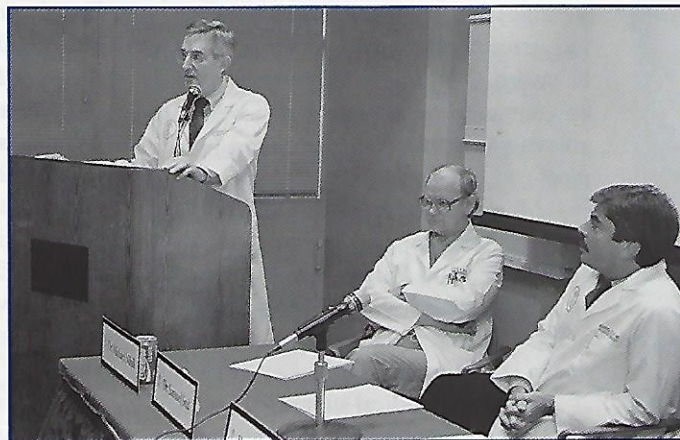
Both Pokorny and Nihill credit the operation's success to experience and a sense of team spirit, as well as improved medical technology.

"We did what we were trained to do," Pokorny said. "What makes this so special is that it required such a huge team effort."

Ultimately, Nihill and Pokorny coordinated a surgical team consisting of several Baylor physicians and alumni with staff appointments at Texas Children's, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and Texas Heart Institute: cardiovascular surgeon David Ott, M.D., '72; plastic surgeon Samuel Stal, M.D., '81; pediatric anesthesiologist Nancy Glass, M.D., '79; pediatric surgeon Mary Brandt, M.D., '83; and cardiovascular anesthesiologist John Cooper, M.D. The surgery was recommended in 1991, when prenatal tests confirmed the twins were joined at the chest and heart.



Tiesha (left) and Iesha (right) with their mother and grandmother



Drs. Pokorny, Nihill and Stal, after the twins' separation

After the twins were born, Nihill discovered a hole in Iesha's heart and performed a balloon dilation to repair the failing organ. Five days after the twins' birth, tests revealed that Iesha's heart had shriveled and that the babies' livers were fused. Fortunately, their hearts were joined by a bridge of tissue that was thick enough to ensure a successful separation.

When the Turner twins were six months old, Nihill performed a second balloon dilation on Iesha's heart.

"During the second dilation, we found the holes in Iesha's heart had virtually

closed," recalled Nihill. "We were really lucky because the hearts were not joined at the separation site, which could have been fatal."

The team of physicians agreed it would be better for the twins to develop more before attempting separation, especially since Iesha had a congenital heart condition. The baby girls went home in May 1991 and a tentative date for surgery was set for June 1992.

One of the major concerns the surgical team had was having enough skin to close the gap once the twins were separated. Stal, an Associate Professor of Plastic Surgery at Baylor, placed tissue expanders under the twins' skin and inflated them with a saline solution to allow the skin to grow.

On June 9, 1992, the surgical team began the delicate procedure: Stal removed the tissue expanders, and Pokorny and Brandt started separating the abdominal area and the livers.

"The separation was a success, thanks to the good road map provided by the radiology department at Texas Children's Hospital," Pokorny said.

Today, with a brand new year ahead of them, the active 21-month-old girls are at home, jumping and playing. They have a large extended family and a home full of love, which both Nihill and Pokorny agree is the best prescription for a happy childhood and adulthood.

"The most rewarding part of this job is to see these young people have a chance to grow up and live full, productive lives," Nihill said. "I'm glad to have been a part of it all." ❧