Rare Disease Causes Bone Operation on Tiny Eskimo Girl

Doctors call it "congenital pseudoarthrosis of the tibia," but to three—year—old Patricia Beavers it's a crooked leg which makes walking nearly impossible.

Hopes are high at Alaska Native Medical Center now, however, that meticulous bone graft surgery performed on Patricia will alleviate the rare condition for which there is no known cure.

Using a new technique developed in the Netherlands, U.S. Public Health orthopedic surgeons in Anchorage took little plates of bone from Patricia's mother's leg and also some from the child's own hip.

These, varying in length from .2 to 6 centimeters, were placed about a metal rod to shape a strong support in the shin area of the child's leg.

Because growth occurs at top and bottom of a bone, this is a feasible strengthening method.

Patricia, a granddaughter of the late state Senator William E. Beltz, will be in a cast for many months and may even need more surgery.

But considering that the old treatment for such a disease was amputation, Patricia's parents, Carol and Lewis Beavers of Anchorage, feel it is indeed worth the present discomfort.

Mrs. Beaver is an aide at Alaska Psychiatric Institute and she feels her work there has given her insight on how to help Patricia deal with her long hospitalization.

Only 200 cases of this disease are reported in the world's medical literature. The malady affects the leg bone in such a way that it seems unable to heal and a false joint is formed.

Bone in the shin region resorbs and disappears, making the leg bend at an odd angle. Doctors have tried two other measures to get Patricia's bone to heal, but these were unsuccessful.

It is not yet known what causes the condition, but it is not limited to any ethnic or geographical group. In Patricia's case, a familial condition known as Recklinghausen's disease (neurofibromatosis) from her father's family may contribute to the child's particular problem.

Congenial anomalies tend to occur in clusters, according to the doctors.