

U.S. surgeon general testifies on behalf of local doctor

by Alf Collins
Times staff reporter

Dr. Edwin L. Hatch, accused of taking indecent liberties with a 13-year-old Seattle patient, took the witness stand in his own defense yesterday and denied any wrongdoing, saying such conduct would be "disgusting and completely inappropriate."

Also testifying was the surgeon general of the United States, Dr. Charles E. Koop, who appeared as an expert witness for the defense.

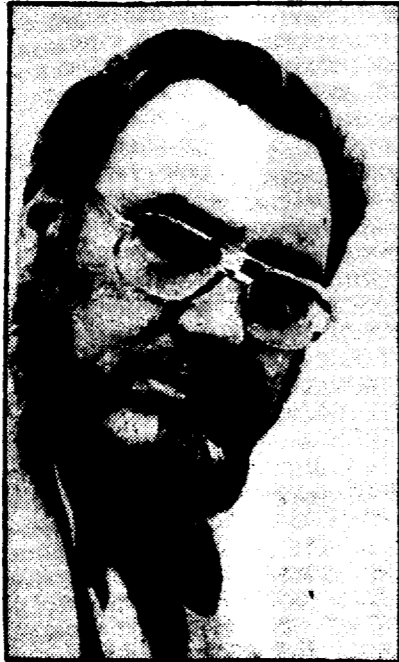
Koop told jurors in King County Superior Court that Hatch, of Medina, once was a student of his and that he had been instrumental in helping Hatch get a teaching position in pediatric surgery at the University of Washington in 1980.

Koop said Hatch studied under him in Philadelphia in 1974-76 and then became chief surgeon at Scottish Rite Children's Hospital in Atlanta before moving here in 1980.

Hatch is accused of improperly massaging the Seattle girl during two house calls after he performed minor gynecological surgery on her Feb. 2 at Children's Orthopedic Hospital.

Koop, who officially retired from practice when he took the nation's top medical post last year, told jurors that house calls are part of the philosophy he taught in Philadelphia.

"I guess I was pretty old."



Dr. Charles E. Koop
Witness for defense

It was for the comfort of the patient," he testified.

He acknowledged, however, that examining the girl alone in her bedroom "turned out not to be prudent, but I might have done the same thing" considering that her parents and the Hatch family were neighbors and friends.

"We all worry about things like

alone with any of my patients. There always was a nurse present."

Koop said he doubted that Hatch could have massaged the girl for 10 minutes within 10 days of the operation, as the prosecution alleges. "I don't think you could be that manipulative without causing pain," the surgeon general testified.

Koop also defended Hatch's going to the patient's home to check the incision the day after the operation and again within 10 days, saying that checking for blood clots as Hatch was doing was good medical practice.

However, Dr. Richard Soderstrom, a prosecution witness, told jurors earlier that a followup visit would not be necessary for three weeks after surgery.

The prosecution contends that Hatch made three visits to the girl's home, on Feb. 2, 8 and 11. The defense denies that Hatch made the Feb. 8 call, producing testimony from Children's Orthopedic medical staff that he was with patients at the hospital until at least 8:15 that evening.

Koop also was questioned about a tendency by some adolescents to misinterpret a doctor's actions — a recurring theme of the defense. Said Koop: "I don't think children, particularly girls, always know what you're doing to them."

The surgeon general also testi-

Hatch had engaged her in sexual conversations during the house calls, as the prosecution contends. The defense says Hatch was simply informing the girl about her bodily functions.

"I would probably do the same thing for a girl who is confused about her femininity and not knowing what to think about changes in

her body," Koop said. "I wouldn't get into problems of sexuality, but I would tell them something like 'you can have a baby' somewhere down the line."

In his own defense, Hatch told jurors yesterday that he also is innocent of prosecution allegations that he once molested a 13-year-old Atlanta boy. No charges have been

filed in that case; the prosecution says it is bringing up the matter only to show a motive and intent on Hatch's part.

After operating on the Seattle girl, Hatch said, he told her parents to expect some bleeding and fever and said he would see them in a day or two. His testimony is to resume Monday.