

BU doc finds Heimlich's role in 'maneuver' hard to swallow

By JESSICA HESLAM

The Heimlich maneuver may be world-renowned for saving the lives of choking victims, but a Bay State doctor is heading a probe into allegations the legendary Dr. Henry Heimlich didn't invent it.

"There's questions of whether he was the originator of the Heimlich



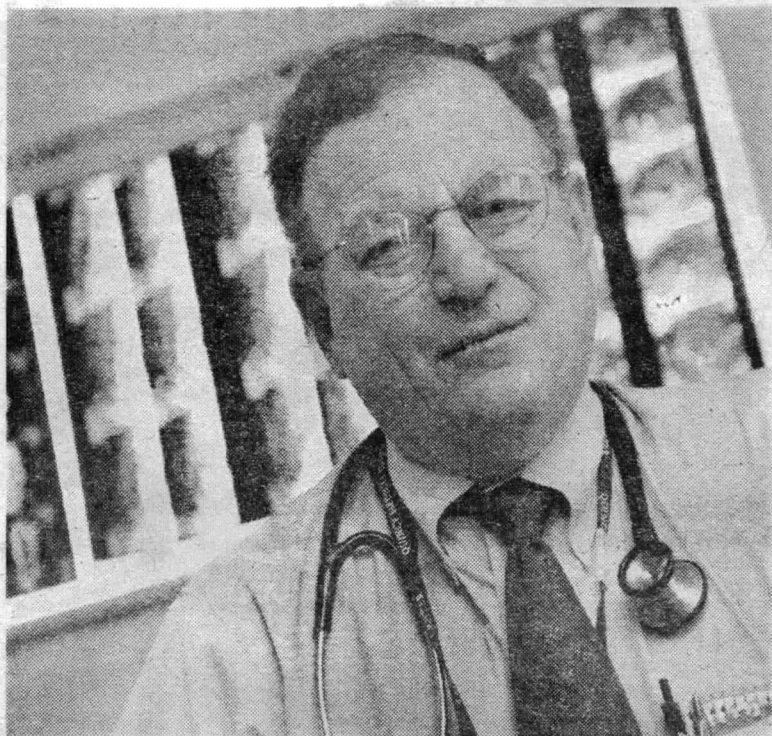
DR. HENRY HEIMLICH

maneuver," said Dr. Robert Baratz, president of the National Council Against Health Fraud, a Massachusetts consumer watchdog group.

"There's no question he promoted it or branded it, but whether or not he was the inventor is a little murky," said Baratz, who is on the faculty at the Boston University School of Medicine.

Baratz also asserts Heimlich, who's 85 years old and living in Cincinnati, has used his famous name for years to promote his own "nonscientific" ideas.

Even Heimlich's estranged son, Peter Heimlich, calls his father a "fraud."



STAFF PHOTO BY FAITH NINIVAGGI

CHOKER? Dr. Robert Baratz, president of a Mass.-based group, is probing whether Dr. Heimlich deserves credit for pioneering the maneuver.

Reached at his home last week, Henry Heimlich called the allegations "a bunch of nonsense."

Among the allegations:

■ Heimlich did not invent the Heimlich maneuver. It was developed by one of his colleagues, Dr. Edward Patrick or Dr. James Fattu.

■ While the Heimlich maneuver is proven to save the lives of people choking on solid objects, Heimlich continues to promote the maneuver to save drowning victims and people having asthma attacks — without scientific evidence. But critics claim the Heimlich can in fact be deadly for drowning victims.

■ Heimlich is involved in human "malariotherapy" experiments outside the United States to prove injecting AIDS and HIV patients with the malaria parasite strengthens their immune systems.

Baratz said Heimlich has tried to turn the Heimlich maneuver into a "universal cure-all."

Henry Heimlich referred questions to spokesman Robert Kraft, who disputed the allegations. Kraft said Peter Heimlich has "worked full time" to smear his father's reputation since the pair had an argument years ago.

Kraft said Henry Heimlich developed the Heimlich maneuver on his own and has not injected humans with malaria but monitored such experiments in China in the late 1990s.

Henry Heimlich knows of the controversy surrounding malariotherapy and using the Heimlich on drowning victims, but still supports both theories, Kraft said.

"After 30 years, he can't produce a single medical expert who agrees with him about drowning," Peter Heimlich wrote about his father in an e-mail. "He has no background in immunology, but insists he can cure AIDS, cancer and Lyme disease by injecting people with malaria. It was painful to discover my father is a fraud," he added.