

'The leech is helping to drain blood out'



**Natural cure:** Hutt Hospital plastic surgeon Charles Davis holds a leech used to maintain blood flow to the man's ring finger. As each animal fills with blood, another takes its place. The X-ray shows the damage to the fisherman's right hand.

Picture, left: CRAIG SIMCOX

# 'Touch and go' for fisherman's finger

## Three digits reattached in a different order

REBECCA PALMER

A FISHERMAN'S amputated fingers have been swapped around and more than a dozen leeches used in a bid to save his hand function.

The Nelson man, 24, lost all four fingers on his right hand when a hatch fell on it on board the Sealord trawler Rehua, west of Farewell Spit, on Sunday night. The fingers were kept on ice while the ship made its way to Nelson and the Wellington-based Westpac rescue helicopter transferred the man to Hutt Hospital.

The hospital's plastic surgeons, Chris Adams and Charles Davis, spent more than nine hours reattaching three of the fingers on Monday. The little finger was too badly "pulverised" to be reattached.

Mr Davis said yesterday that the surgeons had rearranged the three other fingers. The strongest ones had been put closest to the man's thumb, which was intact.

"You want the very best fingers on this side of the hand, so that you can get your thumb across to oppose that."

The middle finger had been put where the man's index finger had previously been, his ring finger in the middle finger's position, and his index finger where the ring finger had been.

The new ring finger was struggling. Mr Davis said. "It's 50-50 whether or not it will survive. The other two fingers look excellent at the current time."

A leech had been put on the end of

the ring finger to improve blood flow.

"There's a good artery bringing blood in. The leech is helping to drain blood out."

Each leech was taken off the finger once it had its fill, reaching double or triple its original size. By yesterday morning, about 12 leeches had been used.

"We've had a separate batch flown up from Christchurch last night because we ran out."

Leeches were not often used but in some cases were "excellent" for helping till the body was able to repair itself.

"We hope the leeches will nurse [the finger] along long enough until the body heals."

He understood the accident happened when the man was cleaning a hydraulically operated hatch.

"While he was cleaning the edge of it, somebody else closed the hatch on top of his fingers."

The ship's crew had done a good job taking care of the fingers, putting them on ice but not in direct contact with it.

Surgery to reattach the fingers was complicated because of the nature of the accident.

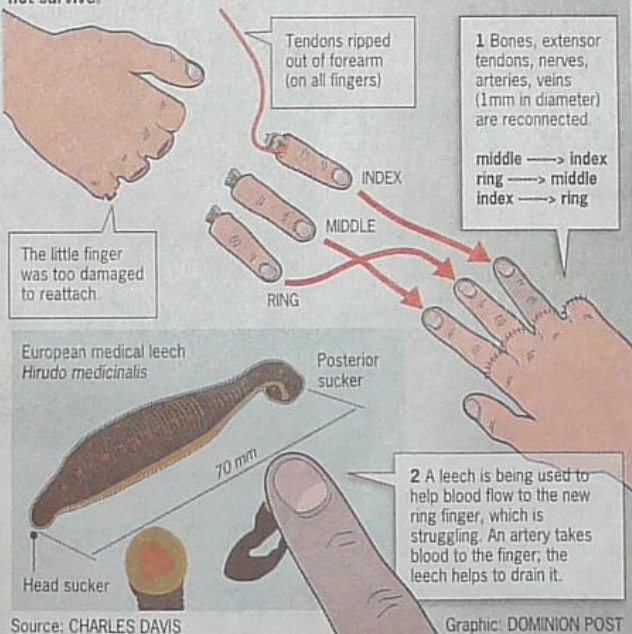
"It's much, much easier to reattach somebody's fingers if they have been removed with a chainsaw in a guillotine-type of manner."

"In this case, the fingers have been crushed and then torn to the point of rupture ..."

"This young man's fingers came to us with the tendons that move the

### ► FINGER SWITCH

A fisherman lost all four fingers on his right hand when a hatch fell on it on Sunday. Hutt Hospital surgeons have reattached three of the fingers, but in different positions to give the best possible hand function. A leech is being used to stimulate blood circulation in the ring finger, which may not survive.



Source: CHARLES DAVIS

Graphic: DOMINION POST

fingers torn out of his forearm."

There was no way to reattach those tendons to the muscle, meaning the man's ability to move his fingers would be limited.

He might benefit from recon-

structive surgery in the future.

Mr Davis said the man was in very good spirits.

"He understands that it is touch and go at this time with regards to the viability of that new ring finger."