Girl hemophiliac seeks normal life

By CONNIE CALDWELL

Libbers desire equal pay for doing a man's job, but who ever thought that a woman would have a man's disease?

Paula Runnels, a 19-year-old freshman psychology major, has hemophilia.

Forty-one women in the U.S. have the disease. Only three other girls in Northeast Texas have it besides Ms. Runnels.

She was told of her condition when she was 13. Most biology texts say a girl with hemophilia won't live past puberty.

"My first thought was that I'd die," she said. "The girl who was diagnosed with me did die. Now my only fear is a car wreck."

With hemophilia, blood clots slowly or not at all. Hemorrhaging in the joints could be crippling.

Before Paula was diagnosed, doctors had told her parents that she suffered from a vitamin K deficiency and even nephritis, a kidney inflammation.

"At first my parents were extremely over-protective. They wouldn't even let me out the door. But of course I was 13 and very active. I'd run track for five years, but the main thing that hurt was having to give up water skiing.

"Now my parents let me go my own way. I guess they think it's time I learned what I can and can't do I know they worry about me — I'm sure they always will.

Because of severe hemorrhaging in her ankles, the tendons in her legs drew up. She underwent surgery twice, a year apart. After 10 months in casts, her ankles apparently healed correctly.

"I was really worred about surgery, but I got through it just fine," she said. "Usually hemophiliacs don't die of loss of blood, but of complications."

Paula graduated from Southwest High School in Fort Worth. She was tutored by a homebound teacher.

"For a while I really liked it because it was different. I only had class twice a week and I could sleep late and watch television.

"My freshman year in high school, though, I tried to go back to school. But the third day a boy tripped me while I was on crutches."

"From the eighth grade to graduation I was in a wheelchair or in bed. But I did walk a little the night of graduation."

She seemingly hasn't let hemophilia keep her from leading a normal life. She pledged Alpha Phi social sorority last fall.

Paula walks now without crutches or a brace. The only difference between her and another college girl is regular trips to Carter Blood Bank for plasma.

Plasma costs $33 a pint. Several students donate blood and plasma monthly in her name. Anyone wishing to donate can make arrangements with the bank.

"Hemophilia makes you realize how much you have to be grateful for. Things could be a lot worse. I've gained a lot of good friends from the blood bank, drives and seminars.

"Most of them are hemophiliacs — some have become addicted to pain-killing drugs," she said. "I want to help them."

Eventually she hopes to earn a Ph.D. in psychology.