

# Butcher's hook causes paralysis

KELLY ANDREW

A YOUNG freezing worker whose skull was pierced by a butcher's hook in a horrific accident is battling paralysis on one side of her face.

The hook, used to hang animal carcasses, went into the 19-year-old's head behind her right ear, tearing the outer ear in half. It came out on the other side of her neck.

The accident, at the Marton meatworks early last week, could easily have been fatal. If the hook had entered her skull a centimetre higher it would have gone into her brain, a centimetre lower it would have cut through the internal carotid artery which supplies blood to the brain.

Wellington plastic surgeon Charles Davis, who operated on the young woman at Hutt Hospital last week, said she was incredibly lucky and incredibly unlucky at the same time.

It was a "highly unusual" injury.

The patient was paralysed on the right side of her face because the hook had severely damaged her facial nerve, he said.

"The hook had penetrated 5 centimetres through her ear canal and gone between cartilage and bone,

pulling very hard on the facial nerve which supplies all the motor function to your face, to raise your eyebrow, close your eyelid and smile."

The nerve was badly bruised and swollen and had almost torn apart.

To help relieve swelling in the nerve as it exits the skull, Mr Davis has permanently lifted off the roof of the tunnel of bone that encases the nerve.

"I would expect her to get good functional recovery of the nerve but it will happen gradually over several months.

"It's a devastating injury for a young person . . . I'm sure movement will gradually come back, but it may not come back 100 per cent. It's too early to predict."

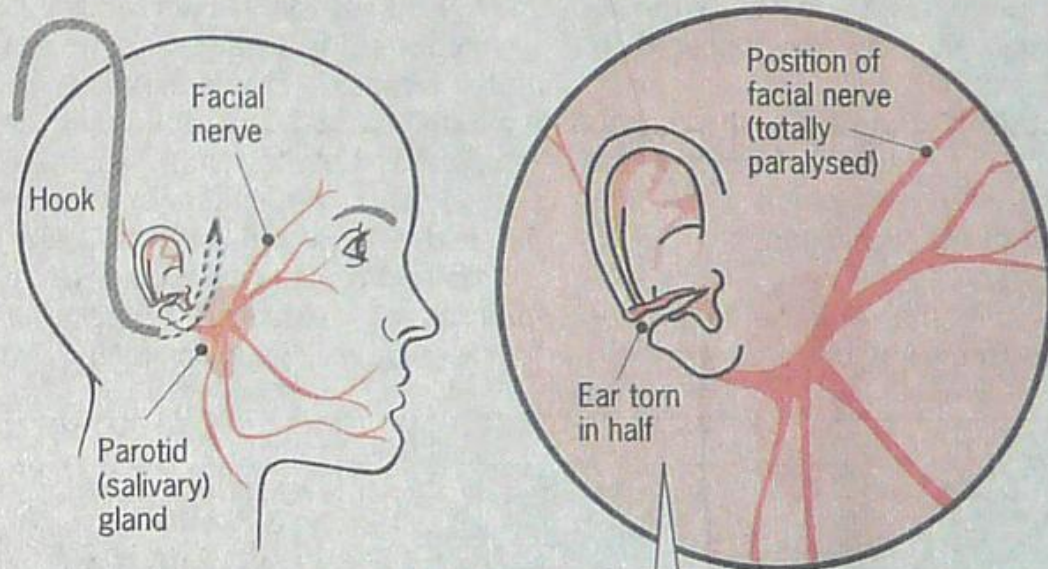
The patient said she was feeling very fortunate to survive and though she found it impossible to smile at the moment, she hoped mobility would gradually return to her face.

The accident happened after a lapse in concentration when she had somehow "squished" her head between the hook and a shield covering a piece of machinery, she said.

She had been working at the freezing works since September.

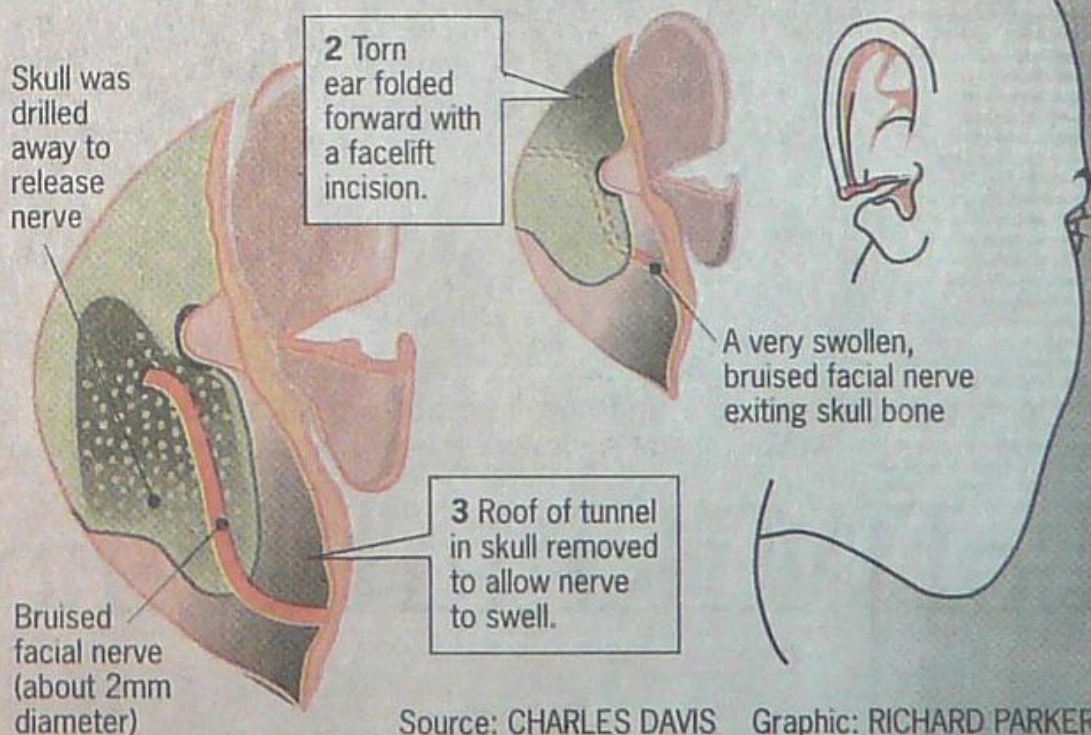
## ► REPAIRING A DAMAGED FACIAL NERVE

A freezing worker's skull was pierced by a meat hook behind her right ear. The hook badly damaged and almost tore her facial nerve. Wellington plastic surgeon Charles Davis operated to remove the roof of a tunnel of bone around the nerve to allow for swelling and, hopefully, gradually restore movement to the patient's partly paralysed face.



**Facial nerve:** Splits into several branches. It controls the muscles used for facial expression such as smiling, frowning etc. It also stimulates the salivary glands to produce saliva and carries taste sensations from the front two thirds of the tongue.

**1** Hook penetrated behind her right ear into her skull tearing her ear in half and damaging the facial nerve, partially paralysing her face.



Source: CHARLES DAVIS Graphic: RICHARD PARKER