



# Heart bypass patients endure long wait

by **Rebecca Walsh**  
health reporter

More than half the people due to have heart bypass surgery at Auckland City Hospital have waited longer than six months and hundreds more cardiac patients are waiting for their first visit to a specialist, a Herald survey shows.

The Cardiac Society says specialists are struggling to deal with the numbers showing up at emergency departments suffering a heart attack or other crisis, let alone those on elective waiting lists — many of whom are so unwell they suffer intense chest pain and breathlessness just from walking to the letter box.

The situation is not much better for many patients needing hip or knee replacements, and people who need their gall bladder removed are prioritised with bowel cancer sufferers.

The Herald surveyed district health board waiting lists at the end of June for heart bypass surgery (cardiac artery graft), total hip replacement, gall bladder removal or cataract surgery.

At Auckland City Hospital 127 people were waiting for a heart bypass. Of those, 71 had waited longer than six months but only six had been given certainty of treatment. The remaining 65 were on active review, which means their condition was assessed every six months to see if they had got worse.

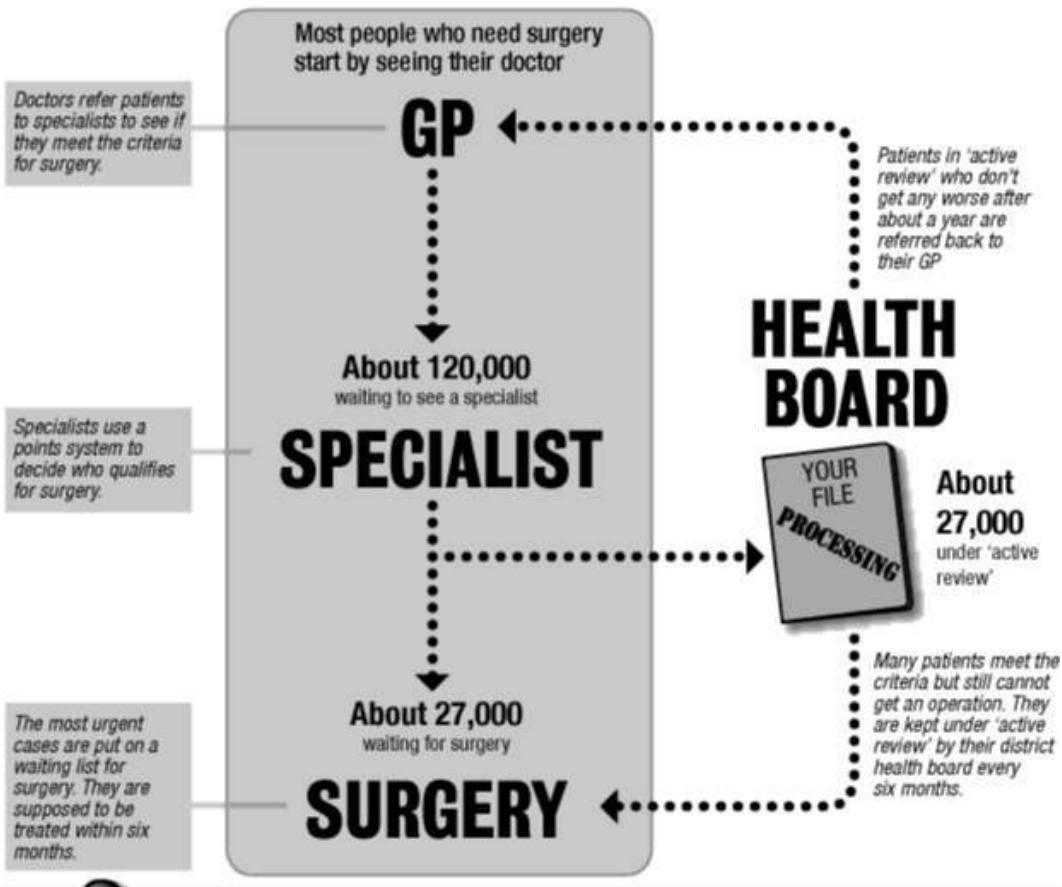
A further 479 cardiology patients (not exclusively those needing a bypass) were waiting for their first specialist assessment and of those, 128 had waited longer than six months.

An Auckland health board spokeswoman said the situation was improving but Professor Norman Sharpe, medical director of the National Heart Foundation, said it was unacceptable that so many had waited so long.

Meanwhile, the Government's orthopaedic joint replacement initiative, announced last year, appears to be having an impact in Auckland — one of the key areas targeted — with nearly 800 extra hip and knee operations in the first 11 months.

## »» The long route to the surgeon

Waiting lists for operations are only part of the long wait for surgery in the public health system. Many sick people are not included on these lists because they are still waiting to be assessed by a specialist. Others are considered sick enough to deserve operations immediately but hospitals do not have enough resources (such as money, staff or operating theatres). They are kept under "active review".





## WAITING LISTS FOR SOME KEY OPERATIONS AT MAJOR HEALTH BOARDS

	Hip replacement		Gall bladder		Heart bypass		Cataract surgery	
	patients waiting	8 waiting more than 6 months	53 patients waiting	8 waiting more than 6 months	127 patients waiting	6* waiting more than 6 months	643 patients waiting	26 waiting more than 6 months
<b>Auckland</b>	50	8	53	8	127	6*	643	26
<b>Waitemata</b>	57	10	129	55	n/a	[Performed by Auckland DHB]	n/a	[Performed by Auckland DHB]
<b>Counties Manukau</b>	70	13	107	34	n/a	[Performed by Auckland DHB]	231	53
<b>Waikato</b>	240	–	178	–	99	–	314	–
<b>Capital + Coast</b>	65	31	88	47	44	3	375	82
<b>Otago</b>	91	26	53	13	16	4	106	5

\* A further 65 patients under 'active review' have been waiting more than six months.

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