

Auckland patients test meltaway heart device

By [Martin Johnston](#)

Auckland patients have been among the first in the world to benefit from a heart device that is designed to eventually melt away.

Early results from 30 patients in an international trial, presented to a scientific symposium in the United States, indicate the re-absorbable device works as well as its standard counterpart.

None had a heart attack, nor a blood clot linked with the treatment, said the maker of the device, Chicago-based medical company Abbott.

Auckland City Hospital cardiologist Dr John Ormiston, one of the leaders of the study, said the researchers were highly encouraged by the initial results from the trial.



John Ormiston

"We are eager to explore Abbott's bioabsorbable technology as a potential clinical option for the treatment of coronary artery disease."

The traditional treatment involves small, expandable "stents" being inserted to expand heart arteries that have narrowed, restricting the flow of blood.

They are expanded with a removable balloon fed in through a blood vessel.

In some cases the artery renarrows from scar tissue growing into the device, which has led to the use of stents that release a drug to prevent this.

But a small risk exists of the problem occurring after the drug release has stopped.

The new bio-degradable stent dissolves naturally into carbon dioxide and water once it has done its work, Dr Ormiston said.

"What we have now is a permanent implant for a temporary problem," he said.

"If you look at a cast on your arm, there's no point keeping it on your arm for the rest of your life."

Another benefit of the bio-degradable stent was that it would not interfere with CT scans or MRI.

Dr Ormiston has just returned from a medical conference in Washington where the trial drew a high level of attention and was reported widely in US media.

However, he stressed it was "early days yet".

Assuming the initial trial is successful, the next step would probably be a large-scale trial involving hundreds of people, randomised against patients using metal stents, Dr Ormiston said.

Up to 10 Auckland patients were involved in the study, the first being treated around six months ago.

The early results are from one month after treatment.

– Additional reporting by NZPA

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