

A Brief History of Breast Surgery

WORDS—JAMIE CHRISTIAN DESPLACES

"Plastic surgery and breast surgery in particular are the expression of art and science which both restores and improves the norm," says Auckland plastic surgeon, Dr Katarzyna Mackenzie. "It is about blending innate artistry with technical excellence."

Breast surgery to treat cancers has been performed for at least 3,000 years, but cosmetic breast surgery, or breast augmentation, is a relatively newer practice dating from the late 19th century.

"Plastic surgery is a noble profession, but the public view of plastic surgery saddens me," says Katarzyna. "It is often forgotten that plastic surgery covers a wide range of different surgical procedures that repair, reconstruct or replace structures throughout the body."

FOR CANCER

For much of history, breast surgery was a brutal affair. It wasn't until 1804 that the very first mastectomy was performed under general anaesthesia, but even by 1844 a major medical review concluded mastectomies to be more harmful than helpful. The development of radiation in the early 20th century allowed for non-surgical treatments, though various forms of mastectomies remained the standard. By the 1980s, lumpectomies—the removal of cancerous lumps and some immediate surrounding healthy tissue—were found to be as effective in treating early-stage cancer as removing the entire breast.

"By far, the reduction in mortality in breast cancer over the last 20 years is the most significant evolution during my career," world-renowned French surgeon Dr Krishna Clough tells *Merve*.

"There is a trend towards individualised treatment and using genes to help with those decisions," adds Dr Ineke Meredith, a Wellington breast surgeon and wife of Dr Clough. "In breast surgery, using such gene testing on tumours means we can save many women from undergoing toxic systemic chemotherapy when their benefit would have been minimal."

FOR COSMETIC

German surgeon Vincenz Czerny was the first to attempt breast augmentation when, in 1895, he transplanted a woman's lipoma (a fatty mass) to fill a defect that resulted from the removal of an adenoma (a benign tumour). In the first years of the 20th century, some implants took the form of paraffin injections that comprised petroleum jelly and olive oil and often resulted in the formation of hard masses, with severe cases even leading to pulmonary or cerebral embolisms.

In 1962, Timmie Jean Lindsay made medical history when she voluntarily received the world's very first silicone implants at Jefferson Davis Hospital in Houston, conducted by pioneering surgeons Frank Gerow and Thomas Cronin.

Breast augmentation remains one of the most common cosmetic procedures both in New Zealand, and worldwide, says Ineke, and one that is prone to trends: "Recently, I was being referred women who were desperate to get their implants out because a couple of celebrities or influencers had taken theirs out and they felt better."

Katarzyna is often tasked with reducing the size of natural breasts, with many young girls "embarrassed about the way they look" and wanting "to be able to play sport".

"With some breast implants being pulled off the market and awareness of anaplastic large cell lymphoma and the breast implant illness phenomenon, patients increasingly choose to have implants and capsules removed and when possible, have the breasts augmented with their own fat," she adds. "Fat transfer can also be used to correct a breast asymmetry, I think we will get to the point where we don't use breast implants anymore."

Pages In The History Of Chest Surgery

Clemens Wendtner



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