

Epidemic of dodgy joints

Medical scandal to hit 100,000

EXCLUSIVE
SUE DUNLEVY
NATIONAL HEALTH REPORTER

SOME 100,000 Australians have been fitted with dodgy joint replacements in a hidden medical scandal, and surgeons are continuing to use 50 flawed devices even after the faults were identified.

A report by the National Joint Replacement Registry shows thousands of patients have been left with devastating complications, including bone degeneration and metal poisoning, and face having a limb amputated or a future in a wheelchair as a result of faulty hip and knee prosthetic implants.

A 10-year review of all the artificial hip and knee devices used in Australia showed 29 hip and 22 knee devices that had been flagged as having high revision rates were still in use.

The federal Health Department has revealed it recalls about 500 medical devices every year, but has seen a 100 per cent jump in recalls in the past five years.

Professor Stephen Graves heads the National Joint Replacement Registry that tracks the performance of 850,000 hip, knee and shoulder replacements in Australia. He describes the health problems caused by faulty devices, such as the ASR hip replacement used on 5500 Australians, as "mind-numbingly terrible".

He said many suffered rotting flesh,

RECALL ROLLCALL

- **2008:** Margron hip withdrawn. Used on 688 Australian patients.
- **2009:** ASR XL Acetabular Hip System and DePuy ASR Hip Resurfacing System recalled. Used on 5,500 patients.
- **2010:** PIP breast implants recalled. About 13,000 implants used in Australia with hundreds rupturing.
- **2012:** MITCH TRH Modular Head used in hip replacements cancelled.

metal toxicity and bone degeneration around the joint replacement. Prof Graves's agency was the first to identify the problems and the device was withdrawn from the market. More faulty devices are being withdrawn faster as a result of the registry's reports, he said.

Worryingly for many patients though, they can remain unaware about the dangers of the devices in their bodies unless their doctors warn them.

Lawyer Rebecca Gilsenan, from Maurice Blackburn, said many victims were unable to sue for compensation because there was no requirement for companies importing medical devices to have adequate insurance when they go wrong.

Medibank says it spent \$27.3 million on hip and knee revisions in 2012 alone.



Stuart Cain had four surgeries after a dodgy hip prosthetic was implanted

My life was wrecked by hip implant

SUE DUNLEVY

WHEN Stuart Cain's ASR hip replacement was removed three years after it was implanted, doctors found a semi-solid substance and metal debris around his joint.

The cobalt levels in his blood were 250 times higher than normal, while his chromium levels were 20 times higher.

The 43-year-old nurse educator has had his hip replaced four times as he tries to recover from the damage caused by the faulty implant that was withdrawn from the market in 2009.

The father and grandfather who hasn't been able to work since March last year says he's still in constant pain, needs a crutch to walk and lives on painkillers.

Photos show the bone where the original hip replacement went is dead and black, and Mr Cain's leg has to be held together with metal bands. "They've just robbed us of everything. I can't even be a husband to my wife anymore," says the man who was told by his surgeon his first hip replacement was the Rolls-Royce of medical devices.

Ironically, Mr Cain, who lives in Queensland, used to promote the ASR hip replacement to patients on behalf of the surgeons who worked at his hospital.

ASR-maker Johnson & Johnson paid for his follow-up surgery, but he is suing the giant to pay for research on the effects of the metals in his body.



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