

Tackling heart disease

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If you are going to have a heart attack then the Nelson region is the place to have it. That's not meant to be a flippant remark but the cardiologists at Nelson Hospital are reputed to be some of the best in the world. We are lucky that they have chosen to live here.

It's not simply the high level of care they provide but the innovative techniques they introduce into the health system.

A new process at Nelson Hospital will allow paramedics, emergency doctors and cardiologists to diagnose and treat heart attacks faster. This means that those suffering from a heart attack are diagnosed in the field and make it as soon as possible to a cath lab, where they have the best chance of survival.

Nelson Marlborough District Health Board cardiologist Tammy Pegg says the development of a pre-hospital procedure streamlines the treatment of heart attack patients. They are working closely with St John in the hope of developing it into a national heart attack policy. The project covers the 150,000 people in the top of the south region. Time is of the essence with a heart attack victim. "Treating a heart attack is critical; you have two hours where you can open up the artery and do a lot of good. Between two and four hours there is probably some marginal benefit, but after four hours there is no point."

Heart disease is often seen as an older man's disease but it claims the lives of more than 50 Kiwi women every week. A campaign Heart Foundation Go Red for Women campaign started at the beginning of this month to highlight that fact. Many of the deaths are premature and preventable, according to Heart Foundation medical director Gerry Devlin.

The foundation is urging Maori, Pacific and Indo-Asian women or those with a family history of heart attack, stroke or high blood pressure to get their heart checked from the age of 45 and European women to get checked from the age of 55. The Jennian Homes Mother's Day Fun Run/Walk is being held in Nelson on May 10 as part of the Go Red for Women campaign.

It's a cause well worth supporting