

MESH DOWN UNDER™

Dedicated to support and information sharing for
New Zealanders injured by surgical mesh.

www.meshdownunder.co.nz

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

By 2002 surgical mesh devices were freely available in New Zealand, which had (and still has) no regulatory requirements for pre-market testing or proof of safety or efficacy for medical devices. Surgeons recommended the procedure to patients, who received very little information about what the surgery involved. Research showed that very few, if any, were warned about the potential risks of lifelong severe complications.

In 2008 a statement was released by the FDA, warning of risks from pelvic mesh such as erosion of vaginal tissues, pain, infection, recurrence of POP, and new onset of SUI. At that time New Zealand's Medsafe had received only 14 reports of adverse events (such reports are not mandatory, and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) did not share treatment injury information with Medsafe until 2017. Medsafe concluded that the benefits outweighed the risks.

This all changed in 2012 when the first US court case against a mesh manufacturer concluded in favour of the patient. The gag order came off and media coverage began. Affected people made the link between their pain and suffering and the mesh implant, and realised they were not alone.

The formation of Mesh Down Under

Mesh Down Under was initially conceived as an online support group for people to share their lived mesh experiences. From the initial group of six members in 2012, numbers grew to over 50 within a few months.

Co-founders Carmel Berry, Patricia Sullivan and Charlotte Korte realised that the number of mesh-injured New Zealanders was increasing rapidly and that the issue needed to be highlighted to the health sector and lawmakers.

Over the following two years, calling themselves 'The Three Meshketeers', they undertook to fully research the scale and scope of the issue, and endeavour to highlight to health authorities the difficulties faced by these patients, as they searched for the recognition of their symptoms and the help they needed.

They sought help from many organisations and people in the health sector, including Medsafe, Women's Health Action, representatives of various medical colleges, the Health Quality and Safety Council, Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC), and ACC. Almost every meeting concluded with the same recommendation, that they pursue another agency or organisation, that 'may be able to help'.

They also regularly wrote to politicians and ministers asking them to investigate the growing number of mesh-related treatment Injury claims. They established relationships with media contacts and got regular coverage by investigative journalists, who were also seeing the global scandal unravelling.

Taking action

By March 2014 they believed they had enough evidence to convince the government to launch a full inquiry into the problem. They launched a petition calling for the Health Select Committee to recommend an

independent and transparent inquiry into the use of surgical mesh in New Zealand. This was followed by their supporting submission, providing 'overwhelming evidence about the use and issues of surgical mesh and concrete proposals of ways to improve outcomes for patients'.

After numerous gruelling sessions where the women were challenged by top health officials, the Health Select Committee's report was presented to Parliament on 1 June 2016. It included seven recommendations, in three areas: the investigation of options for a surgical registry, improvement in medical practice, and the role of the regulator in pre-market medical device approval. The Select Committee decided that actions needed to happen urgently and that an inquiry would take too long.

In a report tabled on 24 August 2016, the government carefully considered the Committee's report and supported all of its recommendations.

The important eight critical words which were part of the Select Committee recommendations were "**take note of the petitioners' and others' experiences.**" And that was the basis for kick-starting and implementing the 'Restorative Justice Mesh Project which finally began in late 2018.

Mesh Down Under currently has 911 members Men and women request to join daily.

Full story with references can be found here:

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/mesh-down-under>