

Cardiac surgery units and surgeons

In 1994 there were 70 cardiac surgeons operating in Australia as well as 14 overseas registrars and 26 trainees, 6 of whom were from other countries. One Australian was in training overseas. There were 37 hospitals at which cardiac surgery was performed but 3 units could not supply data in time for inclusion in this report and have been excluded from the analysis.

Total operations

A total of 19,409 operations was performed in 1994, an increase of 2.5% over 1993. In 1994 there was an average case load of 571 patients per unit, with a range of 53 to 2,160.

Overall mortality rose slightly between 1993 and 1994, from 2.5% to 2.8%. Mortality has stabilised at just below 3% in the past few years even though surgery is now performed on a wider range of patients, including some previously considered unsuitable for surgery.

There was an increase of 5.6% in the total number of closed and open operations in children under six months old. In patients aged over six months, there was also a rise in open and closed surgery of 2.4% overall.

Table 1 presents a summary of all operations, both open and closed, performed from 1985 to 1994, with associated mortality figures. The constant increase in the rate of operations performed and the variable decrease in mortality since 1953 are illustrated in Figure 1. This increase in rate has been entirely due to open heart surgery, closed heart surgery rates having remained fairly constant over the period. Mortality rates for open heart surgery fell markedly between the late 1950s and the 1980s, and have remained fairly constant since then.