

New study shows when 'broken hearts' are most deadly

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A University of Otago, Christchurch, summer student has identified the days when patients are most vulnerable to dying from a "broken heart."

Broken heart syndrome, or [stress cardiomyopathy](#), is a relatively rare condition that mimics symptoms of [coronary heart disease](#). After the Canterbury and Kaikoura quakes, higher rates of patients presented with the disorder – giving researchers a unique chance to study it.

Second-year medical student George Watson interviewed 11 people who suffered '[broken heart syndrome](#)' after the earthquakes. The interviews were for his Summer Studentship programme project, where medical or science students get the chance to take part in a real research project. They are supervised by clinicians and senior researchers over a 10-week period.

Watson found while patients felt worst on the first day the syndrome hits, they were more likely to die from arrhythmia on the following two days. Watson says these 'most fatal' days were often when patients reported feeling better and their blood tests were returning to normal.

Canterbury DHB cardiologist Paul Bridgman was one of Watson's supervisors. He says the findings provide scientific evidence on a condition that has become more common in the past decade. In Canterbury, there has been a 10 per cent increase in patients in last 10 years, or about one patient a week now. Bridgman says most patients in hospital survive the condition but not everyone. Patients in the

community not receiving medical care were also of concern, he says.

Provided by University of Otago

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