



Replacements that are still hip, even after all this time

By Nigel Hawkes
Health Editor

REMARKABLE results have been recorded in a long-term study of the Exeter hip replacement. Nine out of ten hips replaced in the early 1970s with the Exeter implant are still working.

Of the 34 hips given to the 27 patients who survive from those treated between 1970 and 1975, only 3 have failed and required a new operation.

The design was produced in 1969 by surgeons and researchers working at the Princess Elizabeth Hospital in Exeter and was one of the first implants. This year will see the 500,000th patient worldwide to benefit from the implant, whose design has remained basically unchanged.

Surgeons from the hospital have been tracking the success of the implant for 33 years. Although the conventional belief is that implants last about 12 years, they have shown much better results than



Exeter implant: going strong

that. Graham Gie, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the unit, said that with appropriate surgical techniques and correct positioning of the device, there was every reason to believe that the majority of Exeter implants would last more than 30 years.

Christopher Ackroyd, a surgeon who is not associated with the unit, has more reason than most to praise the design. Not only has he implanted several hundred Exeter hips,

but he has two, which he received in 1997 and 2003. Both are working perfectly and he continues to perform knee surgery at the Bristol Nuffield Hospital at St Mary's.

He said: "The Exeter has a superb track record for long-term survivorship. The results in younger patients are much improved and suggest we can expect longer survivorship in the future."

One of the original group of patients is Victor Small, from Sidmouth, Devon, who had his right hip replaced almost 33 years ago. His left hip was replaced 21 years ago. "They're still working perfectly OK," he said. "When I had that first operation, I thought it would just postpone me ending up in a wheelchair. Now, 33 years later, I am still on my feet."

A seminar at the hospital next week will cover a development in the field — the use of computer-navigated surgery to place the implant more accurately, thereby reducing further the need for revision surgery.