
NOVEMBER 2025



Monthly Newsletter

Surgical Society of Wollongong University



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Xenotransplantation
Milestone in
Cardiothoracic Surgery

TRAINING PATHWAY

So You Want to Be a
Cardiothoracic Surgeon?

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Scrubbed

Editor's Note

Welcome to the fourth edition of the SSOWU Newsletter!

As Phase 1 students head into a busy exam period, our team has pressed pause on events this month to give everyone the space they need to prepare — including ourselves. We'll be back soon with a more online events and hands-on workshop in the coming months, so stay tuned for updates!

In this edition, we're shining the spotlight on cardiothoracic surgery — a field that combines precision, resilience, and life-changing impact. Whether you're curious about the specialty or simply looking for inspiration during revision season, we hope this month's features give you a fresh perspective on what it means to work at the heart of surgery.

Research Highlight: Xenotransplantation Milestone in Cardiothoracic Surgery

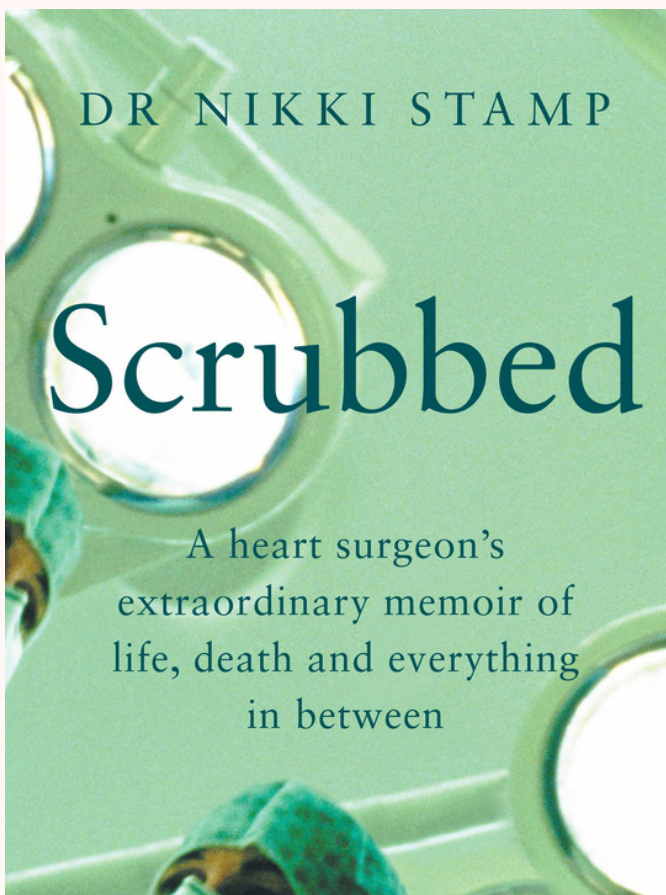
This month, we highlight a groundbreaking case in cardiothoracic surgery: the **first transplantation of a genetically engineered pig lung into a brain-dead human**. The six-gene-edited lung functioned for 216 hours without hyper-acute rejection. Early complications included pulmonary edema and antibody-mediated rejection, partially resolving by day 9, managed with an intensive immunosuppressive regimen.

For med students interested in cardiothoracic surgery, this case exemplifies advances in organ engineering, graft monitoring, and xenogeneic immunology. While promising for addressing organ shortages, substantial hurdles remain before routine clinical use.

Article:

Pig-to-human lung xenotransplantation into a brain-dead recipient

He, Jianxing et al. "Pig-to-human lung xenotransplantation into a brain-dead recipient." *Nature medicine* vol. 31,10 (2025): 3388-3393. doi:10.1038/s41591-025-03861-x



Book of the Month:

Scrubbed

by Dr. Nikki Stamp

In *Scrubbed*, Australian cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Nikki Stamp offers an honest, behind-the-scenes look into the realities of surgical training — from the exhilaration of operating on a beating heart to the exhaustion, self-doubt, and sacrifices that come with the job. Through personal stories and reflections, she explores resilience, mentorship, gender bias, and what it truly means to care for patients while maintaining your own humanity.

For medical students, *Scrubbed* is a rare glimpse into the world of cardiothoracic surgery, blending technical insight with the human experience of being a doctor. It's an inspiring and thought-provoking read for anyone considering a surgical career or curious about life inside the operating theatre.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A

CARDIOTHORACIC SURGEON?



Cardiothoracic surgery spans the heart, lungs, chest wall, and major vessels — from trauma to transplants to complex reconstructions. A highly competitive and technical specialty, the pathway is clear if you prepare early.

THE PATHWAY:

Step 1: Eligibility

- Completion of courses: CCrISP, EMST, and cultural safety e-learning modules
- Successful completion of the Generic Surgical Sciences Exam (GSSE) and Clinical Examination (CE)
- Minimum of 18 months of Cardiothoracic Surgery experience at PGY3+ level
- Minimum of 12 months of Non- Cardiothoracic Surgery experience at PGY3+ level
- Proven procedural skill via a logbook (e.g., sternotomy, conduit harvests, thoracic first assistance)

Step 2: Selection Components & Weighing

	Component	Weight	Key Points
Main Points	Structured CV	10%	Diploma of Cardiac Sonography (2 points) Research Presentation (3 points) Research Publications (5 points)
	Unit Based Competency Assessment	30%	Completed by a Head of Department after working 12 months in a cardiothoracic surgical unit
	Interview	60%	3 Structured panel interview on scenarios & behaviour
	Verbal Reference Checks		Used post-interview for final ranking

Additional Points

- Applicants have a maximum of **three** eligible attempts to apply.
- Regional preferences (training region allocation) are part of the process.

HOW TO BOOST YOUR APPLICATION:

1

Get your Diploma of Cardiac Sonography

2

Get into research as soon as possible

3

Log proven procedural skills

- Ensure you document cases such as stenotomy, conduit harvests, thoracic surgery assistance in a validated logbook.

4

Complete non-cardiothoracic surgical rotations in PGY3

- Two different surgical specialties (≥ 10 weeks each) will strengthen your eligibility and breadth

5

Get substantial cardiothoracic exposure

- Aim for a PGY4 level reg job in cardiothoracic units (including both cardiac and thoracic surgery)

6

Prepare for interview (it is worth 60%!)

- Practice scenario questions on clinical judgement, teamwork, ethics, communication, and leadership.

7

Strengthen referees & competency assessments

- Your unit assessments (UBCA) and referee reports reflect your day-to-day performance

FINAL WORD

There are **187 cardiothoracic surgeons in Australia with approximately 10 new trainees selected each year**. So yes, entry into cardiothoracic surgery is extremely competitive. Focus your efforts on accruing relevant cardiothoracic rotations, logging procedural skills, building a strong CV, and preparing for the interview phase.

Want to chat with someone who's applied or get help preparing your CV? **Reach out to SSOWU to get in touch.**



Website Link:

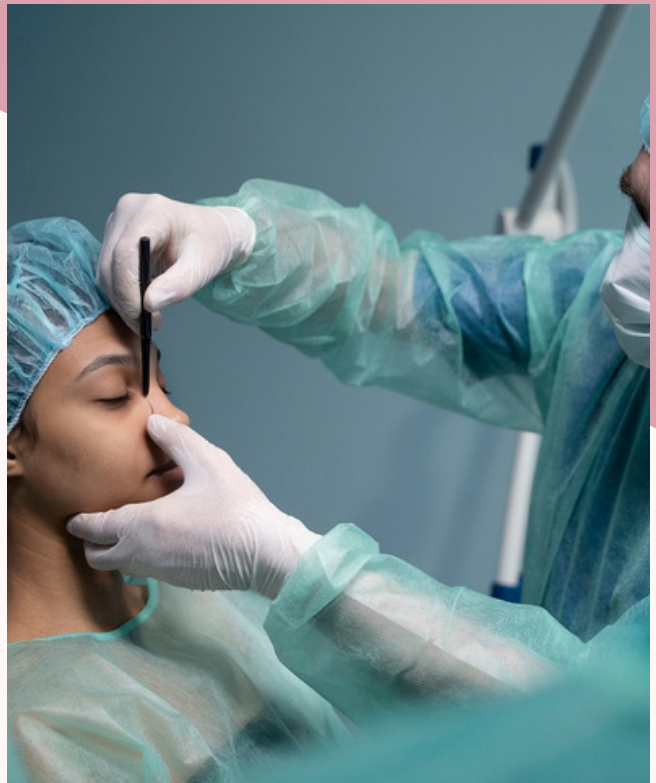
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COMING UP NEXT

Curious about what it takes to rebuild form and function and transform patients' lives with precision and artistry?

In our next issue, we'll be stepping into the world of **Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery** — exploring the diverse training pathway, core operative skills, and insider insights on how to stand out in one of medicine's most versatile and creative specialties.



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