

In 2017, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first human heart transplant that had been carried out by the South African surgeon, Christiaan ('Chris') Barnard at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town on December 3rd, 1967. The daring operation and the charismatic surgeon received immense public attention around the world. The patient's progress was covered by the world's media on an almost hourly basis. Although the patient, Mr. Louis Washansky, died after only 18 days, Barnard soon carried out a second transplant, and this patient led an active life for almost 19 months. Remarkably, Barnard's fifth and sixth patients lived for almost 13 and 24 years, respectively. Barnard subsequently introduced the operation of heterotopic heart transplantation in which the donor heart acted as an auxiliary pump, with some advantages in that early era. It took great courage to carry out the first heart transplant, and this is why Barnard is remembered as a pioneer in cardiac surgery.