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Citation: Crossland, David, Jackson, Sue, Hamilton, Leslie, Lyall, Rosalind, Hasan, Asif, Burn, John and O'Sullivan, John (2005) Patient attitudes to sternotomy and thoracotomy scars. *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon*, 53 (2). pp. 93-95. ISSN 0171-6425

Published by: Georg Thieme Verlag

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-2004-830422> <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-2004-830422>>

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## **Patient Attitudes to Sternotomy and Thoracotomy Scars**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Background:**

There are no data comparing patient attitudes to sternotomy and thoracotomy scars following surgery for congenital heart disease (CHD).

#### **Methods:**

Two hundred and one patients with a scar from CHD surgery (105 sternotomy, 36 thoracotomy, and 60 both scars) had a structured interview to explore attitudes to their scar.

#### **Results:**

Comparable proportions of each group reported that they did not like or hated their scar (23/105 [22 %] sternotomy, 9/36 [25 %] thoracotomy, 17/60 [28 %] both scars). Significantly more patients stated that they were embarrassed by and/or their choice of clothing was affected by a thoracotomy scar (20/36, 56 %) than those with a sternotomy scar (36/105, 34 %),  $p = 0.04$ . This was also seen when comparing sternotomy alone with both scars (36/105 [34 %] vs. 34/60 [57 %],  $p = 0.008$ ).

#### **Conclusions:**

Adults who have undergone surgery for CHD are more likely to have a negative attitude to a thoracotomy than a sternotomy scar. Before a change in surgical approach is considered based on patient preferences, the acceptability and psychological impact of the different scars following surgery needs formal study.