

**OBITUARY**  
**GRAEME SKEGGS**  
**8 AUGUST 1952 – 14 JANUARY 2024**  
**GENERAL AND VASCULAR SURGEON**

Graeme Skeggs was born in Dunedin, the oldest son of Sir Clifford and Lady Marie Skeggs (née Ledgerwood) and older brother of Bryan and David. He attended King's High School, where he excelled at rowing and captained the first 15 rugby team at No. 8. In 1970, during his final year at school, he met Stephanie Weipers, a first-year teachers' college student, and a lasting friendship was established.

Graeme's commitment to a career in medicine won out over the lure of the family business and he commenced his medical degree at Otago University in 1971. He and Stephanie married in 1974. Graeme was awarded the Sir Gordon Bell Prize in General Surgery and graduated in 1976. He trained in General Surgery in Dunedin Hospital, gaining his FRACS in November 1982.

With three children under six years, the family travelled to Glasgow, Scotland for Graeme's post-Fellowship training in Vascular Surgery. There he spent a year at the Western General Hospital and a year at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. In 1986 Graeme came to Nelson Hospital as a locum for a surgeon wanting time off to build a boat. Access to sailing was a prerequisite for Graeme's ultimate choice of hospital, and with Nelson ideal in this regard, he went on to accept a position as a vascular and general surgeon.

Graeme was a meticulous, calm and unflappable surgeon, who set high standards for himself and those around him. As the only vascular surgeon in Nelson during his career, he made himself continuously available for acute vascular care. He would attend vascular emergencies whether on-call or not, without regard for the hour or whatever he was doing. An early morning call about a ruptured aneurysm would be quickly answered in a clear voice and Graeme would be in attendance shortly after. This selfless dedication saved numerous lives and limbs in the Nelson region over the years. He was also a true general surgeon in the traditional sense; his operating lists would run the gamut of the General Surgical curriculum and were a magnet for registrars.

Graeme was particularly proud of his achievement of gaining accreditation of Nelson Hospital for advanced surgical training, which has had lasting benefits for the department. The first registrar commenced training in Nelson in 2000, and four members of the current department of surgery are registrar alumni from surgical training in Nelson Hospital.

He was chair of General Surgery for well over 10 years and chair of Senior Medical Staff in Nelson Hospital. He was instrumental in the local inception of surgical audit – Nelson was among the first Aotearoa New Zealand hospitals to adopt the Otago University Surgical Audit Program – and chaired the process of accreditation of the various surgical departments in the region for a considerable period.

He was a long-serving independent adviser to the Accident Compensation Corporation and to the Health and Disability Commissioner. When the hospital campus was redeveloped, he was a leader in designing the 'hot floor' allowing rapid patient flow between ED, radiology, theatre and ICU. Graeme was recognised for these achievements as the first Aotearoa New Zealand recipient of the RACS Rural Surgeons Award in 2011.

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He was active in business and was director and chair of a number of companies. This knowledge and experience made him an invaluable board member, and he was chair of Manuka Street Hospital Board for over 20 years. He had a major influence in its development from a provincial private cottage hospital to the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century facility it is today; that contribution led to the naming of the Graeme Skeggs Boardroom at Manuka Street Hospital.

Graeme's high standards carried over to his golf, and he was known for his often very audible self-criticism on the tee. He came from a family strongly imbued in nautical tradition and was an avid sailor. In addition to recreational sailing, he raced regularly in events ranging from the weekly Wednesday Tasman Bay Regatta to ocean-going races including skippering in the 50<sup>th</sup> Sydney to Hobart, four Auckland to Suvas and one Auckland to Noumea race. He was a proud crew member on *Nariida*, skippered by his son Nigel, in the Maxi Yacht Championship in Sardinia in 2007.

Graeme's standout personal qualities were fairness, generosity and determination. His retirement was tragically marred by progressive illness but, with heroic and unwavering support from Stephanie together with his signature determination, he was able to continue to enjoy his family and his chosen pursuits, to travel, and to live at his home until just before his death in January 2024.

He is survived by Stephanie, after 54 years together, sons Nigel, Todd and Michael, and six grandchildren. His legacy will endure in Nelson Hospital and the wider Nelson region.

This obituary was provided by Adrian Secker FRACS, Stephanie Skeggs, and the Skeggs family.