Pensioner makes history
Cecil Masupye is pain free after undergoing landmark bypass surgery

A 63-YEAR-OLD Ga-Rankuwa woman became the first patient to undergo a laparoscopic aortobifemoral bypass graft in South Africa - but for Cecil Mosupye, the operation was simply an end to months of pain. The arteries in Mosupye's legs were blocked as a result of hypertension and years of heavy smoking. In February, he began experiencing pain in his legs when walking.

"It's a mismatch of supply and demand," explained Professor Zach Koto, chief of surgery at the University of Limpopo's Medunsa campus. The muscles needed oxygen, carried by red blood cells, but the constricted arteries could not get enough blood where it was needed.

By the time of his surgery last Friday, Mosupye was in constant pain. His left leg had started to change colour.

"If we left the situation as it was, the pain would have worsened. He would have developed gangrene and then he would have needed an amputation," said Koto.

What Mosupye needed was an aortobifemoral bypass graft. The operation involves connecting a Y-shaped artificial artery - or graft - from the body's main artery to the blood vessels leading to the legs.

"We take the blood from the aorta above the blockage, through the graft, to the arteries below the blockage," said Koto. This literally bypasses the narrowed veins, like an on-ramp leading a car out of traffic onto a free-flowing highway.

It's the kind of procedure that's done with surgeons Dr Faisal Ghoor and Dr Peter Kawesa, made six small cuts in Mosupye's abdomen and a seventh on his bellybutton.

The rolled-up graft was dropped into one of these and connected to the arteries.

"The advantage of laparoscopy is magnification, about 10 times that of the human eye, so we can see much better," said Koto.

According to the Department of Health, it is the first time this procedure has been performed laparoscopically in South Africa.

This form of non-invasive surgery is less painful and makes recovery faster. Mosupye is ready to go home. The pain in his legs stopped immediately - a sign that enough oxygen-carrying blood is reaching his muscles.

Professor Zach Koto, who performed the first laparoscopic aortobifemoral bypass surgery in South Africa.