

## **Heart of the Matter**

What are your chances of surviving open-heart surgery in Nassau County? In four of the five Nassau hospitals that do open-heart operations, you can find out: The fatality rate ranges from 4.6 per cent to 16.7 per cent. In the fifth—**Nassau County Medical Center**—your guess is as good as ours. The county hospital has refused to disclose its statistics on open-heart procedures.

The medical **center** says the information might be misleading because the county hospital accepts a lot of high-risk and emergency cases. But we think sick people are entitled to all the available information from hospitals where they might become patients. This is particularly true of statistics on open-heart surgery because—as *Newsday* science writer David Zinman points out in Part II today—the American College of Surgeons says a hospital should do a minimum of 100 to 150 open-heart procedures a year to keep its proficiency at an “adequate” level. The **Nassau County Medical Center** did 19 open-heart operations last year.

One of the factors pushing up the cost of medical care is the tendency for hospitals to take on glamorous but expensive programs that might better be concentrated in a few major medical centers. This would be wrong from the patients’ point of view even if all the hospitals could provide first-rate care. If they can’t—and the medical authorities seem to agree that the best open-heart programs are the busiest ones—we think there’s a strong argument for closing down the infrequently used programs. If the **Nassau County Medical Center** has other ideas, we suggest that it back them up with figures.