

Atrial Fibrillation Ups and Downs

The beginning: -

June 10th 2009 two days before my birthday. A fit and health 57 year old, or so I thought. I was physically fit, I ran attended the gym, had a reasonable amount of energy. Albeit I had attended a cardio unit for a check up about a year earlier, because of a high heart rate during training, but I was given the all clear at that time.



It was the evening of the 10th June, I ran upstairs to switch a television off in my daughter's room, and I was the only one in the house. I came down and entered the conservatory, as I entered I notice that my vision was beginning to blur and I felt light headed, then I felt this tingling sensation down the left hand side of my face. These sensations only lasted about 30 to 40 seconds. I felt shattered after this event. Stupidly I did not call the emergency services, and only attended the doctors the next day.

I was lucky and managed to see my own Doctor, she immediately gave me an ECG. After the examination, she explained that I had experienced a TIA a mini stroke, and that my heart beat was uneven, she diagnosed AF. But first of all I was booked in immediately into the stroke clinic at my local hospital. Little did I know that this was going to be a long trip of hospital visits and consultations?

The stroke clinic attacked two aspects the, TIA and treatment to reduce the possibility of another TIA or a full blown stroke. Firstly I was examined by a consultant; he explained what a TIA was and stated that firstly they would put me on Warferin. This reduces the stickiness of your blood and reduces the ability of the blood to clot. To stabilize me to a level that they required took over a week and required daily attendance at the clinic.

After this I visited the consultant again, he confirmed that my Warferin level was stable (INR) and that he was referring me to the Cardio unit.

The Cardio unit checked my heart with the usual ECG and then an Ultra sound of the Heart and the carotoid arteries. I would say at this point of the check up I was having difficulty in walking any distance without puffing and panting and generally feeling totally shattered. The cardio consultant confirmed the initial diagnosis of AF and my heart beat was not in sine rhythm. He explained the way forward with this condition, initially one of medication was prescribed. This was a tablet called Securon; initially I was prescribed half a tablet (Half Securon). I must say the effect after a day or two on this tablet made a difference, and my energy levels came back, but not to complete normality.

I was scheduled to see the consultant within a month of starting the medication again, during this month I was asked to attend a clinic to have a 24 hr monitor attached.

This unit hangs around your neck, the size of a small IPod, the leads are attached to your chest and back area. This constantly records your heart rate over the period of time specified by the clinic.

At the next meeting with the consultant this information was available to him, it was noted from the results that with medication I was still suffering from irregular heart beat (symptomatic AF). The consultant prescribed an increase in the medication to one full tablet per day.

The process described above was complete in just over a month.

The Focus time

During my consultation with the Stroke consultant he had prescribed Statins, and had put me on symvostatin, this was to reduce my cholesterol level down, even though it was not high in the first place. My own doctor called me in when this happened and told me that they had queried this medication as it clashed with the Securon the cardio consultant had prescribed. She said that she would monitor this closely, by having frequent blood tests. Within six weeks I was off the Statins due to me having an adverse reaction to the tablets I ended up with a High CK figure. I was immediately put on another form of tablet none statin. This is Ezetab; this appears to be working with out adverse effect

My periods of AF reduced for a period of three months or so and my energy levels recovered during this period. As my time came to see the consultant again I felt Ok and on my visit they stated that my heart rate was back in Sine rhythm, and that I should carry on taking the medication, and that they would see me again in six months. About a month or so after this visit I started to have sessions of AF again. This started with very brief sessions, but by the time of the next consultation I was back to my bad times again with days of exhaustion and fatigue. I suppose I was lucky at the time as I was also unemployed, so it did not affect my Job. The consultant stated that it would be beneficial to have another monitor test, this time it would be on for about a week, and after this had been analysed he would see me again. On my next visit he Increased my dose of Securon from one a day to two a day. One in the evening and one in the morning. He stated that this was the maximum they could go to with this type of medication, and explained that it is not uncommon to have to increase the dosage as the body gets use to the drugs.

After a week or so of taking the increased dosage I started to feel better and the AF reduced but did not go away completely. Shortly after this period I started a new job and I felt that things had started to look up. Over the next few months I settled into my new position, and the AF stayed about the same even with the increased workload. I visited the consultant again in November 2010 and he suggested that I see another consultant in Glasgow with regards an Ablation procedure. As my profile fitted the requirements for this procedure, age, fitness condition, and that it would appear that the medication route could be one of a temporary nature in my case.

In February 2011 I received notification that I had a date with a consultant in Glasgow about the Ablation procedure in March.

The consultation duly took place; it was explained to me the pros and con's of the procedure. I will say that in all the consultations I had, this was the first time I felt that the consultant understood what I was going through.

The decision was mine to take, even though there is risk I felt it was worth going for, I just wanted to get back to the levels of fitness I had in 2009.

Things moved on quite quickly from here on, by April I would be having the procedure. The date drew closer and I must admit I had reservations, but all I could focus on was to regain my health and fitness back.

The day of the procedure and I found myself in the Golden Jubilee Hospital in Clydebank. This hospital specialises in heart procedures for the west of Scotland. The staff excelled in their care and attention, from explanation, procedure and after care. I was out the next morning, feeling well, bruised and missing some body hair.

The consultant informed me that it might take up to a month to feel any benefits from the procedure. Over the preceding week I had a couple of AF bouts, but they did not last for any length of time

The Recovery

At the time of writing this article it is nearly two months after the Ablation procedure, I feel completely different, no more fatigue, no AF that I can detect at least. I am still on all the medication, and I am due to meet with the consultant in July. Will he take me off some or all the medication I do not know, to be honest if I have to stay on it and I have my life back who cares?

This period of time from The TIA to date of completing this article is two years all be it a few days, 60 in a week's time and looking forward to it and beyond.