

My Experience of Atrial Fibrillation and Ablation



I have had Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) and Ventricular Arrhythmia problems since 1984. My condition has deteriorated gradually over the years and after suffering medication side effects in 2002 I was advised that I would need to stop taking the anti-arrhythmia drug (Amiodarone). I had been taking since 1984 but it was now causing Hyperthyroidism and compromising my heart condition. To enable my doctors to wean me off Amiodarone, it was decided that I should have a Biventricular ICD implanted as a backup while they found alternative anti-arrhythmia drug therapy. I was fitted with my ICD in August 2003 and over the next few years several Beta Blockers were used in combination with other medications in an attempt to try to control my increasingly difficult arrhythmias.

In 2009 I started receiving shocks from my Implantable Cardiac Defibrillator (ICD). It was discovered that I had developed Atrial Fibrillation (AF). Unfortunately my ICD was recognising the fast atrial arrhythmias in my heart as life threatening ventricular arrhythmias and shocking me inappropriately. I was admitted to The Heart Hospital in London to undergo tests and observation to see what could be done.

In the summer of 2009 I was successfully cardioverted through my device. I was taken into a normal examination room, given a sedative and the ICD technician shocked my heart through my device. I awoke feeling pleasant and calm. The improvement to how I felt was instant. I had no pain and I could breathe normally again. My doctor escorted me on foot back to my room, I went to bed and she went out to The Party in the Park to see Blur. It was now about 8.30pm and she had worked on to make me more comfortable for the weekend. She was fantastic. I went home sometime the following week.

Unfortunately it was not to last as a couple of months or so later the AF returned. After tolerating it for a few weeks and having a few shocks I was back in The Heart Hospital. My condition was now worse than ever, I could barely walk. My Consultant discussed atrial ablation. It was apparently difficult to determine if my AF was developing in the left or right side of my heart and to ablate the right side of the atria is a relatively simple procedure. But the odds were that as all of my arrhythmias prior to the AF were on the left side, my AF would more than likely also be on the left side, a more difficult and risky procedure taking several hours apparently. I agreed to proceed with the ablation, fully understanding the risks which they have to go into finite and frightening detail over. This is more to do with hospital insurance protocol than a medical decision of what's best for you, but their hands are tied I guess. Everything is very much the "patient's choice" these days. There's always a risk and no one wants to be sued.

I had my ablation in October 2009 and fortunately for me the area of my atria requiring ablation was actually on the right side of my heart, in 45 minutes I was done and haven't had been in AF for 18 months now.