

Dennis Read, 61, details his six-and-a-half-year struggle of treatment following his diagnosis of atrial fibrillation in October 2005.

Over my first three years of AF, I was in and out of my local hospital like a yo-yo with many other nasty experiences along the way, including a time when I was given sotalol for my heart which made me feel ghastly.

My first atrial flutter ablation took place in February 2009, which triggered an AF attack immediately after the procedure. The surgeon was very surprised by this and told me that he would need to perform another procedure called a pulmonary vein (PVI) ablation in July 2009. The second AF (PVI) procedure didn't work either, so I was told to expect a third ablation procedure, which took place on 31st

December 2009. However, unfortunately, in October 2009 I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and began 37 daily treatments of radiotherapy six months later on 15th March 2010. Trying to manage AF was bad enough, but to have to manage cancer too made me feel like *'what have I done so wrong in life to deserve two serious medical conditions?'*

To cut a very long story short, not only did I have a third ablation procedure done but I also had a fourth on 2nd December 2010. Again, neither procedure resolved my AF problems, in fact I felt worse. After each of the four ablation procedures, I initially felt relatively better but after a month to six weeks all of my symptoms returned.

At this point my surgeon said: 'I feel the way forward is to offer you a pacemaker', and I agreed. The pacemaker was to be implanted on 15th August 2011, but I was having so many AF attacks that my implant was brought forward to 21st July 2011.

Again, I had huge expectations that the pacemaker was going to be the answer to my prayers, for the fifth time. However, I must admit that I was very disappointed with the pacemaker during the first two to four months, and it seemed as if heart procedure number five in six years was not the answer either. Then suddenly, I did start to feel better - actually, I was feeling 75% better. However, I was always feeling tired, not the sort of tiredness you get when you have had a busy day, instead a feeling of exhaustion all the time.

I saw my consultant on 12th March 2012 who believed it was the medication making me feel so tired. My daily medication regime was flecainide 2 x 100mgs daily and one emergency 100mgs, if I felt unwell. In addition, I took bisoprolol 2.5 daily - so we agreed for me to cut down on the flecainide by 50% within the first month, then if that worked, I was to stop the bisoprolol on 9th April 2012. I never felt that this medication reduction would help me because my surgeon had asked me to stop all of my medication after each of my ablation procedures, and within 36 hours of stopping the medication all of my symptoms had returned.



However, good news reared its head at long last one week after 9th April 2012. Thankfully, most of my symptoms have not returned yet, just odd bits of flutter or a mini-dizzy spell for five seconds or a tad shortness of breath for a few seconds three - four times a week, which I can honestly say, is a record for me. I feel I am about 85% better. If I can go another three weeks without the bisoprolol, and then one final month before I stop using the other 50% of flecainide - I could be on the final furlong of my heart condition.

I have been told by the surgeon that if stopping the medication does not resolve my problem, and my AF continues to flare up then I will need my AV node ablated. Touch wood, at present, I am getting on pretty well and hope to stop using all medications, including warfarin. But, I never look forward to success anymore until it happens these days; because I have had so many set backs I just don't want more disappointments.

So, by the time you read this I will possibly know whether I am out of the woods, after over six and a half years, fingers crossed.

Dennis