

## **Finding a Life I can enjoy alongside AF**

"I went on working for two to three years after developing arrhythmias, during which time I had twenty + admissions, which rendered me unreliable for my nursing posts as it affected other team members. Hence my premature retirement at the age of 55 on medical grounds, after 37 years of service with the NHS!

It seemed to me once you had one arrhythmia it just followed on to others, although I knew this was not the case. I had an ablation for flutter, but soon developed runs of Atrial Fibrillation after the ablation. After a further ablation for another problem, I kept pretty well for nearly two years. However, it now looks as though I may need a third ablation for another type of arrhythmia.

Unlike many other medical problems, most of the time people with arrhythmias look fit and healthy, and even when you are not feeling brilliant, so you just try and get on with life. People keep telling you how well you look...and then you feel a bit of a fraud!

I've had other complications as well, with severe hypertension, and then was diagnosed with diabetes a couple of years ago. Thankfully, I'm managing to control my diabetes on diet alone, even though it is just something else to get your head around! Luckily I'd run Diabetic clinics for the past fifteen years, but it came as a bit of a shock!

I've found going to the Phase IV Cardiac Rehab class a God-send, and a positive experience, as no gyms or leisure centre would take me on with my medical history - but I'd put on a stone since becoming unwell! I also swim half a mile twice weekly which is excellent for the whole body, but especially the heart and lungs! I've also had to amend my driving - I've had several periods when I've been advised not to drive for several weeks or months.

Although it is a whole new world, and sometimes AF seems like a 'scourge', I can say there have been some pleasant surprises since my forced retirement. Almost by accident, a year ago, I set up a little jewelry business in my village, which has kept me occupied and very busy! I feel a success despite a forced retirement; and I no longer suffer guilt, embarrassment or worry when I am unwell, because I am no longer responsible for letting down a whole team of nurses. Fortunately, I now have someone willing to cover me, even at short notice! If somebody had told me two years ago that I would be a business woman, I would have laughed out loud!

I have kept my Royal College of Nursing membership and insurance up to date, in the hope that I might be able to return to nursing, but when I am unwell I am reminded I why I retired early!

So, my message is to keep positive, explore every possibility and you will also hopefully find a silver lining to your cloud!!!"

By Mary Anne Cochrane