

Gary: My AF Story so Far

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My story starts in April 2004. I was production operations manager at a fairly well known cosmetics company.

Up to that point my health had been pretty good apart from my weight going up and down for the previous 30 years. I did keep that under control by firstly playing squash, and then by running around 50 miles a week. This I had to give up a couple of years earlier due to an accident at a previous employer which resulted in skin-grafts to both lower legs. At the time of AF onset my weight was completely under control.

That day in 2004 I had a row with my boss who was a company director. We had been under huge production pressure ever since the 9/11 disaster and I was working many long hours. I was accused of letting the tidiness of the production department slip (even though he was constantly hounding me for more and more production at all cost). He did this by bellowing at me in front of my 30-40 staff rather than talk to me in private. (Just my luck to work for the 'director from hell')!

That night I ended up in A&E with my heart racing at around 200bpm. I was given tablets and then sent home with instructions to make an appointment with my GP.

For the next 2 years I had several appointments with a local cardiac specialist. I had been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. In that time I took several different tablets including Sotolol, Amiodarone, Bisoprolol, Enalapril and Aspirin. None of these worked!

My symptoms included a racing and spluttering heart. Sometimes this would last a few minutes and sometimes it would go on for hours.

Over that 2 year period I felt that my condition was not being taken seriously. When I told the doctor that I could feel my heart jumping around in my chest he looked at me as if I was making it up. Even a local GP that I once played squash with on a regular basis, told me that I should just go for a long walk! I ended up in A&E several times during that period but quite often by the time that I got to see someone, the problem has subsided! You then feel a complete fraud and are reluctant to go again. You feel as if you are wasting the doctor's time, even though you are told the opposite. I even wore a couple of recording devices for up to a week. It was just my luck that I had very few symptoms during that week! As a result I once again looked like a complete idiot.

By the end of 2005 my relations with my boss at work had become worse and my heart had also deteriorated. It was affecting my ability to concentrate and

when my request to temporarily reduce my hours was rejected, I resigned. I have not worked since!

With my condition becoming worse I decided to see an AF cardiac specialist further away. After another round of different tablets including Flecainide and Warfarin, I was told that I could have ablation. I had asked my previous consultant but my enquiry had been politely ignored.

My only problem with having the ablation is that my weight has now gone up again to around 24 stone. The specialist told me that I needed to get under 20 stone for safety and to increase my chances of success. I was told to go away and to get in contact when the weight had gone. By this time I had been to see my GP and after jumping through several hoops over a period of 18 months, I was given the funding for a weight-loss operation. This after being turned down twice! I was amazingly told by the weight-loss surgeon that I needed to lose a couple of stone first to show how committed I am to losing the weight! I have now done this and I should be having the operation in April.

I was given the funding for this because of my current situation. My heart has become worse and often it feels as if I have some sort of creature in my chest trying very hard to get out! I am also feeling very tired and I am now experiencing chest pains and shortness of breath. I am told it may be angina and I am awaiting yet more tests. My poor health has also made me very depressed and this has caused me to turn to food and put on the extra pounds. When my heart thuds and splutters, I become very frightened. I am convinced that it will kill me. I am told that it will not, but it is difficult to feel so positive when you feel so ill. Most days, my symptoms start around 3pm and then go on right up to bed time. I then wake up several times during the night with my heart jumping. Also, I often now wake up with the same problem. Occasionally, I have a day or two when things are very quiet and in the middle of 2009 I had a couple of months where I had hardly any problems at all. I thought that I had been given a miracle cure and was planning a return to work, then one day it all came back and I was brought back to earth with a bump! I have had daily problems ever since.

My mother has AF. She just has the odd funny beat and says that she cannot feel a thing! I am so envious of her. At 50 years old, 31 years younger than her, I wish that I could not feel a thing! I am sure that people think that it is just the old heart flutter that everyone gets now and again. I wish it was. I would still be working for a start. As things are I do not know what the future holds. I have already had to sell my house and move into rented accommodation. A house that we owned for 20 years, gone because I am not working. When my heart plays up, I am completely immobilised and just want to curl up in a corner somewhere. I hope the ablation works. Problem is, the specialist told me that

it may not. He says that I also have an ectopic heartbeat and that the operation may cure one problem but not the other! I don't at this time know which one it won't cure.

Just waiting for the weight-loss operation now, and then I can contact the cardiac specialist. I guess that I will need another appointment and then wait for a date to come through for the ablation. Might get it done this year I suppose? It's been 6 years now and I have just about had enough!

One thing I did do was contact the AFA and explain my situation. They have been great and opened up new avenues of information for me.