

## **Louise's story: AF my road to recovery**

**AF sufferer Louise tells her harrowing story, from her initial atrial fibrillation episode to her second ablation procedure, and her slow and steady road to recovery:**

'I started getting lone paroxysmal atrial fibrillation at the end of January 2009. I was sitting at home and my heart starting beating very fast, it just wouldn't slow down so I called the doctor. He said that if it didn't slow down within an hour then I should go to hospital. After an hour, I made my way to the nearest hospital, upon arrival I kept on having to use the toilet, which I later discovered is one of the symptoms of AF.

'Straight away I was put onto an ECG machine, and I think sometime after I went into resus, which was very frightening. Little did I know that I would be going into resus practically every time I went into hospital, and was therefore given amioderone to slow my heartbeat down. I stayed in hospital for four days and they confirmed I had atrial fibrillation and was put on sotalol as a consequence. I stayed on sotalol until the end of the year and tolerated it quite well to begin with. As I went into 2010 my AF episodes became more frequent. My cardiologist said that ablation would help me, but of course I didn't know what it was at the time. My symptoms included very fast heart beats (up to 200 bpm), severe dizziness (on the verge of passing out) and breathlessness. I was washed out every time and felt very upset.

'I eventually met with an electrophysiologist and he put me on the waiting list for an ablation in November 2010. He did warn me that AF can get worse and become persistent, so it was best to do the ablation whilst my symptoms were intermittent. In the summer of 2010, my AF started again with an episode in my car. I was rushed to hospital and was admitted for a week. During my stint in hospital, I was given flecanide and as a result suffered an attack brought on by drug. However, at the time I was not aware this was the cause. I was later transferred to a larger hospital where they confirmed my attack was flecanide-induced. Staff at the hospital washed the drugs out of my system and gave me a cardiac MRI scan, which confirmed I did not have heart disease - this was a great relief.

'I underwent my first ablation in September 2010 and was well enough to go home the very next day. After three weeks, I was back in hospital again with another AF episode and felt very disappointed. I was put on a low dosage of bisoprolol, which was increased gradually during 2011. From April to August 2011, I was AF free and thought the ablation had worked. However, late August I had another episode but I was due to see my electrophysiologist for a review the next day. He said "let's get rid of this for you" and I had my second ablation on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011. I watched while they performed the procedure and didn't feel scared. I'm getting a few ectopic beats, which I have been told is normal and I'm still in my recovery period. This should last until the end of March 2012, which is when I go back to see my electrophysiologist.

'I haven't been able to work for four years now as I've had around 30+ attacks, most of which, have resulted in a hospital stay. I've been a member of the AFA since my first ablation procedure, which has given me the opportunity to talk to lots of patients who have really helped me, and I've learnt a lot during this time. But I'm keen to learn more. I know that second ablations have a higher success rate (80% and more), so I'm hopeful for a good outcome.'