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Living in the shadow of atrial fibrillation

- Bob, Bob are you all right. What's happened to you?
You're white as a sheet.
Look you stay there, I'll call an ambulance
- How long's he been like this?
- About 15 – 20 minutes,
- Did he complain of chest pain?
- He was holding his chest but he didn't seem to be in any pain, he seemed very confused.
- He's tachycardic, (to Sam) which means his heart's racing and he's got a very irregular heartbeat.
Bob, you've had some kind of attack. And we need to get you to the hospital.
- When I had my first AF attack I had no idea what was happening. All of a sudden my heart was racing, I got breathless I couldn't breathe. It was the most terrifying thing I have ever had happen to me in my life.
- Get hold of A&E, Let them know we have a 62 year old male with suspected AF. His blood pressure's really low, it's 80 over 60.
- I was really not sure whether I was going to live or die because I didn't know what had

happened

- He's been a little confused. He collapsed doing some decorating, wife found him in good time fortunately.

- Atrial fibrillation. It's getting faster, 180. Is this his first episode?

- According to the paramedic, his wife said he's never had anything like it before.

- He's compromised, Let's cardiovert him.

Clear!

He's back in sinus. Do a 12 lead ECG and I'll take another look at him in 45 minutes.

- Patients with atrial fibrillation often have to go to hospital because for example they develop symptoms like palpitations that need urgent treatment or they may develop stroke or they may develop serious heart failure.

- Since my first attack I have actually been three times in hospital for ablation procedure and three times for cardio version

- When he was called back to the hospital for another one, one of my sons drove him to the station. He told me later he had waved goodbye to him at the station and he said, 'Mum, I didn't know whether I was going to see dad again, I felt terrible.' And I have gone through exactly the same thing, you never know what is going to happen, it's the not knowing that is the worst thing about AF.

- I got very depressed and very, very scared. It is such a frightening thing to happen to you and because you don't look ill a lot of the time people don't realise just how weak you can be. It can really make you into something of a prisoner in your home.

- It has been terrible to see how his self esteem has gone down and down. He can't take part in vintage car races any more which was his great love, he's an engineer, it's just too heavy for him now

- I don't always know when I am going to have an attack. You could be walking down the street. There doesn't seem to be any particular trigger for it, it just happens.

- Some patients with atrial fibrillation have a condition which is easily treatable But in many instances the atrial fibrillation is a chronic disorder They're admitted time and time again to the hospital in order to sort out the rhythm disturbance or the complications of the rhythm disturbance.

- Well it wasn't like I was rushed to hospital in an ambulance or anything. I got out of bed one morning and started feeling sick, I thought I had lost my footing because I came over very faint.

- I stayed in bed all day because I was so frightened of what had happened to me. It happened again a couple of months later, I went to the GP. He didn't know what was wrong so he referred me to a specialist at the hospital and I had an MRI scan and a hearing test. He couldn't find anything wrong, so I carried on for about six months and had another attack.

It took two years before a neurologist finally told me that I had got heart problems. It was very distressing because I hadn't got the energy to do things like I used to do.

Since I was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation I have been backwards and forwards to the hospital and doctors so many times I have lost count.

Once I was diagnosed I was given beta blockers and warfarin. I was on those for six months but it didn't make any difference. I was a stronger drug after that, it made me feel worse, tired all the time.

- Well I've got the results of your ECG and unfortunately it shows that you are back in AF, now that tells me the medication you're on isn't doing the trick. Now all I can suggest is we put you on some fresh medication to control the AF and we'll just have to get you back in for some more tests unfortunately.

- Oh OK, more tests. Alright.

- I have always been very independent but I have had to rely a lot on my friends and relatives for lifts and help. When I was unable to drive I had to ask a relative to take, or relatives to take time off work to take me to hospital

- Family life can be very disrupted and of course the complications of atrial fibrillation can be quite devastating.

- The future it does cause a worry, because the one thing that terrifies me more than anything else is stroke. I would like to see my boys married and I would like to see grandchildren one day.

- Yes I worry what is going to happen to me in the future. I am worried about a stroke, I am worried about a heart attack, I am worried that if I have to give up my job my financial security would be in jeopardy.