THE EFFECTS OF SUPRAVENTICULAR TACHYCARDIA AND WHAT IT IS LIKE BEING CURED WITH ABLATION

I started with the episodes that were later diagnosed as an PSVT in May 2000 and ended up in A&E to have it dealt with by an injection. That was successful.

Over the next year I had only one or so of these attacks, but from May 2001, they became more and more frequent. By September 2001 I was getting an event when my heart-beat was going up to 210, 240, every 10 days to a fortnight. Having had a number of these where I had to go to hospital to sort them out, I then went through my Doctor to see a cardiac electrophysiologist in December 2001.

From there I went through the waiting list for the procedure. I waited 12 months, and I ended up having the procedure twice, finally in August 2003 the procedure was successful. I had an ablation procedure, the initial procedure in December the previous year was looking for apparently alternative pathways that weren’t there, but the second procedure involved going into the AV node and dealing with it. Thankfully it was very successfully. Now I get the occasional indication that racing heart is about to start but they don’t actually happen – you get that sensation – I felt it first in my brain that something was about to happen. Although I still get those occasionally– perhaps oversensitive to them having had them for so long and so many of them - nothing has actually happened. My heart returns to a normal rate and I’m fine.

I’m a retired head teacher but I still work for an examination board which involved a lot of travelling across the whole country. With the SVT, I couldn’t actually guarantee to stop these events, and if I couldn’t, I would need to get to a hospital. I was finding that I didn’t know when these were going to happen - any time of the day or night- I could be on a motorway, at an airport on a train. Apart of the physical discomfort, there was always the increasing stress of not knowing when they were going to happen and whether you be able to stop them. I was virtually on the point of closing my life down, I was not prepared to continue travelling to the extent I was. I was fearful of having these events in a place where I couldn’t do anything about it. It wasn’t just stress for me; it was stress for my wife. I think she felt it very acutely and was getting to the point where she only wanted to be at home. At home I had developed a strategy for coping with this which involved sticking my head in a bucket of iced water which had worked on a quite a number of occasions! The stress of it all was very great.

The actual discomfort of it was traumatic in a way – if I couldn’t stop it with the water procedure I would find I had an hour or an hour and half to get to an Accident and Emergency department. Within that time I would become very clammy, very dizzy, gradually start to lose my sight. I was still conscious but my sight would go grey, dark grey to black. I would lose sensation in my arms and legs and at that point I had to be in an A&E so it could be dealt with, with drugs, or on three occasions I had a situation where the vagus nerve kicked in and stopped it almost miraculously of its own accord. But up to that point the effects of going through that process were very distressing to say the least.

Mr David Mills, Manchester

I found no problem with the ablation procedure; it was explained to me very clearly a few weeks before I came in. I came into the department and saw a video of the procedure and the idea of ablation gave me no problems. I was more than happy to go through that; it was the least discomfort I could foresee. It was far less stressful than having one of these events going on. When it was successful it was quite remarkable; you actually go away with virtually no marks on your body apart from one of two little marks and you don’t know you’ve had anything done. Yet the most fundamental organ of your body has been treated and cured – miraculously.

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