



Promoting better understanding, diagnosis, treatment and quality of life for individuals suffering with cardiac arrhythmia



My Dear A-A Reader

Please read this scary cardiac tale - I never thought anything like this could ever happen to me but now I know it could easily happen to anyone. Please avoid the same experience happening to you and yours.

I am a 70 year old (young) male, excellent normal health & both my parents died a lot older than I am - must have Levi 501 jeans. In November 2006 I had an annual check by my GP who recorded my blood pressures at 165 / 75 and a pulse of 68, during the Spring of 2007 I began to feel less well, then getting out of breath more quickly. What made me see my GP Doctor was a feeling of being close to fainting, dizzy and listless - I took 6 hours to mow lawns which normally (2006) took two hours.

The night before I saw my GP I used the UK National Health Service web site www.nhsdirect.NHS.uk to check out my symptoms (I did not use the telephone as I did not think my symptoms were serious). From a Chest viewpoint the site advised me to rest at home but from a Heart viewpoint (I never had any pain or fainted) I was advised to dial 999 for an ambulance - what to do with two extremes? so I went to bed hoping I was doing the 'right thing' and wake up. Note I and my wife each have had over 30 years Hospital experience - engineering & medical records. Some medical background - I had stopped taking 75 mg of Aspirin daily about three weeks ago because I thought I may be 'faced' with a prostate biopsy - seemed a good idea at the time and I was blaming my symptoms on the lack of my normal (twenty years plus) daily aspirin dose.

Sitting down with my GP I explained my recent symptoms - she took my pulse - twice - by her wrist watch and then told me stay seated while she collected an ECG unit. My pulse was 34 with a haywire ECG showing a Heart Block situation. She explained even if I was a 25 year old Olympic Marathon runner my slow pulse would still merit a full ECG check. What's a Heart Block? (complete in my case) in simple Engineer terms our hearts have a clump of cells on the top like a car's petrol engine Ignition Coil with a Timing circuit - the High Tension lead from these cells goes down to another clump of cells a bit like the car engine distributor which then sends pulses to make the four heart chambers open close in sequence. In my Complete Heart Block every other one or so of the pulses was missed hence my slow pulse rate of 34 instead of the nice normal of say 60 to 100 per minute.

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Registered Charity Number - 1107496

President: Prof A. John Camm, QHP, MD, FRCP, FACC. **Trustees:** Dr Adam P Fitzpatrick, MD, FRCP, FACC, Dr Derek Connelly, MD, FRCP, Mrs Trudie Lobban, Mr Chris Brown F.C.A., Mr Nigel Farrell LLB(Hons)
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I asked what was the outlook / options and told without a pacemaker not to make any plans for the festive season or 2008. I was taken to the Cardiac Care Unit at our local Hospital where I was fully examined for a week with 24 hour telemetry while I waited for my pacemaker to be fitted. The Specialist Pacemaker Centre staff were superb and I was a very apprehensive patient on the day but without any other options ... I had the procedure fully explained in that I would be conscious with a local anaesthetic - I mentioned to the Surgeon my thoughts that aspirin or rather the lack thereof were to blame and he replied 'We shall never know' Walking into the OR was strange and then lying on the table as the star attraction a bit weird - unless you have seen Dr Beverly Crusher in action on Star trek - however I did have misgivings noting that perhaps my last moments before I shuffled off this mortal coil / table would be looking at a Windows XP screen saver. The procedure was painless two leads were passed through my veins to connect with the heart cells and then the very small elegant titanium pacemaker fitted just under my left collar bone as I am right handed. When the leads were connected and the pacemaker (its small say a thin slice of a medium tomato) fully tested I was sewn up and helped to walk back to my bed. I was immediately aware of my increased pulse rate and general feeling of being up to speed again, the only discomfort was during my first night in bed I felt as if I was hanging upside-down from a tree with increased blood pressure.

Its now six very positive weeks since I had my pacemaker installed. I was not allowed to drive for the first week, during the first two weeks I was asked to keep my left hand below my head and be careful. I have now been told I can lead a normal life but to avoid contact sports - not too difficult at three score years and then and that the pacemaker will require battery replacement in six to ten years time - I hope to keep that date.

I may forget I have a pacemaker but I will never take it or the UK NHS for granted.

Keep on Dancing Dear Reader

John Wooldridge

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