

Merlene's long journey, suffering mis-understanding and doubt, simply because no one considered Atrial Fibrillation

I was FINALLY diagnosed with atrial fibrillation in June last year, and had a Cardioversion at the time, which didn't work.

I have suffered badly with it for the last 14 years as it was not diagnosed. I was treated with disdain from family, friends and especially the medical fraternity, one doctor even asking me if I had considered seeing a psychiatrist when I was admitted to hospital after falling over at home. As I had no visible injuries it was assumed I was 'looking for attention', which seems to go hand in glove with atrial fibrillation. All too often we patients are treated for 'Anxiety' or such, because unless proof is furnished by way of monitors, I'm afraid it's a case of 'You're on your own, kid'.

Many, many times I have been taken to hospital in my distressed state with accompanying light-headedness. As I couldn't accurately describe my symptoms and most importantly, wasn't suffering a heart attack I was dismissed as a malingerer or needing attention. One doctor actually laughed at me.

It is not clear what caused the atrial fibrillation, but as I couldn't lift my arm and felt so washed out after childbirth I would conclude that started it. I consulted medical practitioners, GP's and Specialists until I was sick of the sight of them, being diagnosed along the way with Vertigo, Migraine and Anxiety, and having umpteen stress tests, halter monitors and an Angiogram. I also have a paralysed right hemi-diaphragm, again no known cause, which impacts on the atrial fibrillation. At present my medications are Coumadin, Sotalol and Coversil, and I take Sedacalm, which seems to keep everything steady. Normally, that is.

The latest episode came about when I bent over the end of the bed in the middle of the night, half asleep, and pulled the doona up constricting my chest in the process. This time I was also diagnosed with Tachycardia, but because I was visiting another area the hospital staff were reluctant to do anything apart from oxygen and Anginine, telling me that I would need to see my own doctor to change my medication. He did not deem it necessary to do that, saying I had been investigated fully and there was no underlying cause. I have not consulted either the doctor who did the Cardioversion or my Cardiologist yet, as I prefer to find out what my options are, if any.