

## **“Heart Attack” from a Patients point of View**

***“You have had a heart attack!!!”***

To a reasonably fit 53 year old man running his own business and travelling regularly around the UK. The words **“Heart Attack”** alone cause stress levels to rise dramatically; these are the last words in the world that anyone relatively young and fit want to hear!

I had been feeling a bit unwell following a couple of days on the road. This manifested itself on the third day with a strange feeling of tiredness and an ache in my jaw; I was also suffering from a dull ache in my upper stomach.

Following my evening meal which was accompanied by my usual bottle of beer I felt not too bad but as the Wednesday evening turned into night I had developed a niggling ache in my upper arm muscles and in the wrists of both arms. By bedtime I was worried, feeling unsettled and in some pain just above the rib cage.

I do not normally worry about such things but on checking online, it appeared that I had the symptoms of a heart problem, further compounded by the fact that I knew I suffered from high blood pressure, a problem I had chosen to ignore for the last four years, now very much to my own cost.

I called 999 and described my symptoms to the operator who told me to sit tight and await assistance. I was very concerned and within 10 minutes an ambulance had arrived at the door. The paramedic and his technician a cheerful giant of a man asked me many questions and on checking my blood pressure and pulse rate decided to take me into the local casualty department at Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary.

By the time we arrived I was feeling a bit better, blood was taken for tests and lots of questions asked, when eventually seen by a doctor I was told it sounded like a gastric problem and I was sent home, relieved that it was diagnosed as not a heart problem.

The next couple of days left me still feeling a bit unwell but I struggled on. By the Sunday afternoon following my usual grass cutting and trimming routine, I again felt unwell and in pain, after a rather sleepless and disturbed night I decided I would seek further assistance on the Monday. There is something in the make-up of men which makes us suffer before we seek any form of assistance and by this time the pains were telling me I had suffered enough!

On the Monday morning I attended an appointment with my GP who examined me, asked me lots of questions and he referred to the blood tests which were taken at DGRI which showed up as normal, I was prescribed some tablets for my stomach and tablets for my blood pressure. The rest of the day was good and relatively pain free.

Tuesday and again I was not feeling so great during the day and into the night through to Wednesday I could hardly sleep for the pain in my upper abdomen and ache in my arms as well as a pain through to my back. On Wednesday morning I called my GP's surgery and was told to pick up a prescription for pain killers later in the day.

The next day Thursday, I had a court appointment and although I had slept well I was in some discomfort as my case was called and resolved. On returning to my office I was feeling much worse and on reaching my office the pain in my arms had become more intense by 11.15am. I decided to call the GP surgery again and was asked to go in at 11.30am, I asked my brother to drop me off and was by this time in considerable pain and sweating buckets.

My GP asked me a few questions then decided to take an ECG of my heart rhythm. I am not sure whether he got a shock when he saw the trace but he turned quite white and quickly asked me to swallow some aspirin, explaining he suspected something was wrong with my heart. I was told I would be sent to Dumfries Infirmary by ambulance which was very quickly changed to The Golden Jubilee Hospital at Clydebank and by Helicopter.

Judging by the demeanour of my GP and the staff in the local GP hospital where I was lying on their treatment table I was having or had had a **HEART ATTACK!**

I did not feel any great concern, a concern which was reflected on the faces of the people who were working around me. I was in pain but in my local GP hospital being attended to. Within a few minutes there was an ambulance paramedic and technician who proceeded to insert a needle into my left arm matching the needle in my right arm inserted by my GP. I was told I would have to consent to a clot busting drug being administered which carried a slight risk of a stroke. I think my words were *"just put it in"*. It is difficult to recall all the drugs that were fed into me at this time but I could feel that there was a serious concern about my well being.

I was allowed to make a couple of calls on my mobile whilst receiving treatment and as I lay on the table I began to feel the pains in my chest recede.

I waved goodbye to my doctor and his staff and was loaded into the ambulance for the journey down to the playing fields and swimming pool where the helicopter would land to pick me up. I recall thinking how our small town would react to the air ambulance arriving and could not help but remember the times I had played football on those pitches and swam freely in the adjacent pool.

I was constantly reassured by the ambulance staff and with the help of a good measure of morphine felt very calm and comfortable. I was joined in the ambulance while waiting for the helicopter by my eldest daughter.

The patter patter of rotors finally became audible as the helicopter swept in over the nearby river landing out of site behind the ambulance. I was quickly joined by the paramedic from the helicopter and notes and information were exchanged before I was loaded feet first into the bright yellow helicopter. Again I was continually being reassured that I would be all right and a set of earphones was jammed on my head as the crew ran through their checks and we were up and away. I don't recall too much about the journey as I was flat on my back with a monitor just above my head but I was very comfortable and almost pain free.

On arrival at The Golden Jubilee Hospital a, former private hospital built with American money and then used by the Arab nations before being taken over by NHS Scotland, I was transported a short distance by ambulance to the Hospital doors before being wheeled into a bright room with what looked like a large x-ray machine in the middle. I was surprised to be quickly undressed and put in a gown before being slid onto a table below the x-ray machine. A doctor with a nice educated Scottish accent introduced himself and began issuing instructions and taking in information almost simultaneously. I was attended to by a small team of nurses while I thought the Doctor was fiddling about with my right wrist. At this point I felt completely safe in the hands of this team who went about their business in a very efficient manner. I was being fed drugs through the needle in my arm while the Doctor seemed still to be working with my right wrist.

The language they use in hospital is not that of the layman, in fact they could have been talking Greek. However, I managed a glimpse at a monitor and wondered why I could see someone working on a heart. It took a minute or two for me to realise that it was my heart I was seeing and I now realised that the Doctor had accessed it through a small hole in my right wrist. I did feel some pain and discomfort while he was pulling out the clot which had caused me to have a heart attack and while he was widening my constricted artery, a legacy from my late mother a heavy smoker of woodbines who died when she was 58 and who lost her brother to heart disease when he was only 52.

I don't think that from landing in Clydebank until I was placed in a ward took any more than an hour. I was feeling wonderful, no pain but a few bruises where they had stuck needles into me and a splint on my right wrist through which the Doctor, under local aesthetic, had paid a visit into my heart. I was offered food and ate a sandwich; I was able to let people know where and how I was and later received a visit from my partner, nephew and a close friend who had called me on impulse from the Erskine Bridge which I could see from my window.

I slept so well that night and was subjected to various tests in the morning which seemed to please the Doctors and Nurses; I was to be transferred by ambulance to Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary on the Friday afternoon.

There are many types of disease which can cause a heart attack, the problem however is not so much the attack but the effect it can have on the heart. The great fear is the damage which can be caused to the heart itself if it is starved of blood for any length of time which can leave the victim severely disabled; I was about to learn just how lucky I had been.

Following a two hour journey down the M74 to Dumfries involving listening to a very chatty Ambulance Paramedic; I was back through the doors of DGRI where I had first come on the Wednesday night a week earlier. Still feeling very well although tired I was first sent to the Cardiac Care, Ward 8, but deemed fit enough for the more general Ward 9 where I would be subjected to many tests before being discharged, by now I was wondering how all this would affect my future life.

That evening I was allowed to walk up the corridor and next day following another good night's sleep I began to be confident enough to venture around the ward. The other three people in my room on the ward were excellent company and we all managed to keep one another's spirits high.

I was now receiving medication which I was told I would have to take for the rest of my life; however it was fast becoming evident that any damage to my heart had been remarkably minimal. I was seen by the Cardiac Rehabilitation nurse and given so much information it was almost impossible to take in, but everything which had happened to me was explained in a clear and concise manner. I realised that I had just had a very lucky escape.

By the Saturday evening I was beginning to get into the hospital routine where each day is punctuated by little events, like wake up, breakfast, drugs, shower, doctors round, tea, news paper man, etc; the staff all went about their daily and nightly business in a very efficient and ever so friendly way.

Following my four days of observation I was subjected on the Tuesday morning to a test on a treadmill, where I was wired up to a heart monitor and observed by a Doctor whilst being subjected to a 12min walking test to ascertain how my heart was bearing up after its trauma. I am pleased to say I survived the test without experiencing any further chest pain at all.

I was discharged that afternoon on the sixth day after my helicopter dash to Clydebank feeling better than I had for ages.

So what now? Well there are some negative factors in my lifestyle which has contributed to my newly found heart disease. I am male living in the West of Scotland. I have inherited some bad genetics from my mother's side of the family. I ignored my high blood pressure and my lifestyle is somewhat stressful. However, there are also a number of factors on my side which helped reduce the damage caused by my heart attack and which have given me the chance to make the most of the rest of my life.

I am not allowed to drive for four weeks by law and I need to inform my insurance company. It is now only three weeks until I can drive again a small inconvenience to put up with.

I am not overweight, I have never smoked, I don't drink to excess and I am reasonably fit; add to that the swift action of my GP and the new rapid intervention system developed in Scotland for treating heart attack victims. The skills of Paramedics and Helicopter crew to the wonderful skill of the Cardiac Surgeon and the care of not just the nurses and doctors but the hospital staff who keep these places clean and spotless. I am very lucky and have been given the opportunity to further reduce the risk of having a reoccurrence of my heart attack.

The heart is the strongest muscle in the body; it can repair itself if given the chance. My arteries can also repair to some extent and my medication shall assist with this process. I have been warned by my body that I have a problem, but with proper management I shall be able to resume my day to day life without any impairment.

I shall attend the rehab clinic, do the exercises, make the small changes to my diet and take things maybe a little bit easier. Today just over a week since I took ill, I walked for just over a mile and felt great, I looked in at my workplace and sent an email. My life is not over it just needs to change a little and I need to take a few little pills every day from now on to keep me healthy. I can now look forward to a more health conscious future.

**Heart attack, what Heart attack?**