

VIRTUAL LAF CONFERENCE

Proceedings of 47th Session
January 11th, 2006 – January 29th, 2006

SUBJECT: Post-Ablation Problems

There has been a lot of discussion about post ablation problems prompted by Philippe's recent experiences. Someone suggested that this be made a conference room subject so that we can all share our experiences knowing that our contributions will be preserved for posterity :-).

I believe that is a real good idea - so here goes:

I had my ablation in Bordeaux on April 12, 2005 and have been afib-free ever since. I had a severe run of PVCs the morning after my ablation and they only stopped after I had an intravenous infusion of potassium. I have always had trouble holding on to my potassium so having 2-3 liters of saline put into me during the procedure (to flush and cool the catheter) probably did not help. Anyway, for the next five months or so my heart was still a little unsteady and I certainly felt ectopics now and then - this despite faithful oral supplementation with magnesium glycinate and potassium gluconate. I then decided to have a couple of intravenous magnesium infusions and that seems to have done the trick - no more ectopics at all and the old ticker steady as a rock.

So based on my experience it is very important to ensure that you are not deficient in magnesium or potassium. A naturopath or a medical doctor who is a member of ACAM (www.acam.org) can give the magnesium infusion. I think it should be standard procedure after an ablation.

Hans

Okay, I'll play this game! :o) I am not sure exactly what is desired, but I will give it a shot.

Ablation 08/26/2005, following one year of continuous, never-ending atrial fibrillation. Performed by MD's Natale and Hongo at Marin General Hospital, Marin County, CA.

I was 65 yo, in excellent physical condition.

1. Ablation went fine, took about 3 hours.
2. After ablation, I was placed on Sotalol, which was a new drug for me. The next day I was weak and trembly. The day after that I contacted the MD as I was so weak I could not walk up a ramp. I went to the ER on Sunday at the hospital where Dr. Hongo examined me and did an echocardiogram.

I was removed from the Sotalol, and the drug was not replaced by any other. As a result, we decided to wait in the area for 3 extra days and rescheduled our flight out. We flew out successfully.

Since then I have returned to full function. My only "blip" was when I was bicycling 3 weeks post ablation. I had been doing 20 mile bike rides, but about 3 weeks post-ablation I got into an Afib for about 3 hours after trying to show off climbing a steep little hill on my bicycle. It took about 3 hours to get back into NSR.

Since then totally in NSR and am taking no drugs except for a daily adult-size aspirin.

Denver Fox

Hans,

That's an impressive testimony for IV magnesium! Even the spoken name, "magnesium", must evoke strong feelings of joy, relief, and gratitude.

Troy

I would be interested to hear from any permanent afibber who had a successful first time ablation - performed by anyone anywhere.

JohnC

Hi All,

My PVA was performed by Dr Gill at St Thomas Hospital in London on 1st July 2005.

Prior to the op I had become chronic with debilitating AF lasting for up to 2days, almost every other day.

My Cardio in Brighton Dr Onunain got me on the waiting list at St Thomas.

I was started on Warfarin early in the year, as Dr Gill likes his patients to be nicely anticoagulated prior to the procedure. The procedure itself lasted 5 hours and I had to have a couple of shots of Morphine throughout.

I had been told that it would take approx 2-3 days to get back to normal following the procedure, which obviously I took on board and expected.

I was therefore very disappointed to find that I was still in AF after the procedure and feeling thoroughly disillusioned. I had 5 lines in for the op 2 in each groin and 1 through my collarbone. The two in my left groin and one through the collarbone were quite troublesome, and left huge bruises when withdrawn.

About 10hours after the op, I started to feel some normal beats coming through and eventually went into NSR albeit intermittent around 12hours after.

I went home the day after this and just took things very easy. I felt very weak and tired, but positive, as I was getting some good NSR coming through.

However on the third day at home, I was unable to get out of bed and was passing out so my wife called an ambulance. It transpired that my heart rate had gone up to 150 while asleep. I was taken to our local Hospital and after a few hours there they decided to cardiovert me. Although I had this done before, I found it very worrying having to undergo it so soon after the ablation. Anyhow, they put me out and did it, and I woke up some time later in NSR, and I have been for 98 percent of the time since. I cannot speak highly enough of Dr Gill, Dr Onunain and their staff at St Thomas in London.

Kevin J

John c, you should do an author search on the regular bb for Wil Schuemann, spelled exactly like that, and email him. He was a permanent afibber and had his ablation with Dr. Natale.

PeggyM

"I would be interested to hear from any permanent afibber who had a successful first time ablation - performed by anyone anywhere."

My message is just two entries above yours! Feel free to contact me.

Denver Fox

I had my ablation on August 19, 2005 and after a rocky post ablation am proud to report that things are much better. I have not had any fib since procedure, although flutter was a problem for the first four months. Ectopic episodes still occur, but are steadily getting less. I'm back to normal activities, although remain on amiodarone 250mg (started on 1200mg) and coumadin. Now, since this conference board is dealing with post ablation problems, here goes. I had a tamponade. It didn't require further surgery, but triggered pleural effusion and to top it off I had a catheter induced bladder infection that was put in post op. I spent almost two weeks in the hospital, had to be cardioverted once, almost twice (flutter rate reached 212 at times) before starting amiodarone as a last ditch effort. It converted me after 24 hours. I have always been healthy and spent the first month post ablation asking what had I done to myself. This was elective, but I had maxed out on 3 different meds and was having several fib episodes a month. Now I would do it again, but I would travel to Jackman in OKC.

Barb

I had an ablation on 11/22. Had 3 catheters in the right groin and 1 in the left. When they took the catheters out, it felt as though they were hitting a nerve. Very painful. One week later I had a hematoma in the right groin that was so bad I couldn't put any pressure on it. It hurt to even lift it. That lasted a week. Evidently, this is not uncommon. I went into arrhythmia 10 days after the procedure for 30 minutes, then 2 days later went into arrhythmia for 2 hours, 2 days later went in for 5 1/2 hours. Although these episodes were far shorter than pre-ablation episodes, I was very disappointed to have any arrhythmia. On New Year's Eve, I drank too much and had 24 hours of constant (every other heart beat) PACs and PVCs and then went into arrhythmia for almost a full day. I was afraid I had "broken" my ablation!! I have had no problems since then, hardly a missed beat which is very encouraging. For two weeks after the procedure, I had constant PACs or PVCs and I felt as though I couldn't get a full breath. I also had vertigo for 2 days after the procedure probably due to the way your neck is positioned for the TEE and the heat sensor they shove down your throat. My throat hurt for a week and I had this little cough. It almost felt as though I had pneumonia. Sometimes, my heart would feel as though it was trying to go into arrhythmia but it would settle down after a minute. I found the procedure traumatizing. I don't like being in a position where I have no control and hospitals take away all control. I was not happy to hear that you need to take coumadin for 6 months (I thought it was only 3) and they have had a hard time regulating the coumadin which means weekly blood tests (yuck!). I am still on Tikosyn, Cardizem, prescription potassium and magnesium. I will be weaned off medication in March. There are days now where I forget I have an arrhythmia which is a joy. It was a constant "threat" preablation. Oh, my right groin still gives me problems now and then. It will be painful to walk for a few minutes, but then goes away. But even that is happening less and less and may be due to some residual hematoma.

vh

Ablation on 11/03/05 by Drs. Natale and Hongo at Marin General. Had one short (1 hour) run of flutter about a week after the ablation. NSR since with a few PVC's. Tapered off Flecainide one week ago. Still on Coumadin and Atenolol.

Much as I hate to use the heart monitor three times daily I do find reassurance to notice that the beat is steady and that I don't get calls from Hongo's office after I transmit the data every couple of days.

I developed a hyperthyroid condition sometime between going off Amiodarone last June and the annual physical blood test in November. The endocrinologist gave me Tapazole for it but the condition remains and so does the fear of the condition putting me back into afib as it has done with other patients.

I regard the ablation as successful to date. I have the last CT scan for stenosis in a couple of weeks and hope to get off the Atenolol as soon as my thyroid settles down.

I continue with lo sodium V-8, taurine, COQ10, fish oil and a bunch of other supplements I took before this whole thing started.

Gordon

I had my ablation by Dr. Natale on Feb. 15, 2005, a Tuesday. I had no afib, no ectopics, nothing but NSR until the following Saturday evening, when I suddenly went into afib, confirmed by my ECG transmitter to the CC. That episode lasted about 6 hours.

I then stayed in NSR until the next weekend, when I had a 17-hour off and on episode of NSR mixed with all kinds of whacky stuff, very high rates, very low rates. Possibly some afib also, but neither of the ECGs I transmitted during the period showed afib. One was sinus tach, but the doctor who took my second transmission said he had no idea what the rhythm was, except that it wasn't afib!

Again, I had a week of NSR and then went into a 12-hour episode of afib with a heart rate around 150. The final episode of afib was about two hours of NSR mixed with short bursts of afib, and it felt exactly like afib was trying desperately to take hold again, but couldn't. In the next two weeks I had some episodes of PACs, and these gradually diminished and were pretty much gone by the end of the 6th week.

I had no complications during or after the procedure.

I have had a 24-hour holter at 4 months and a 48-hour holter at 8 months, and both were free of afib and showed surprisingly little ectopy. I have a final 48-hour holter scheduled for next month, and that will be it for my follow-up with Dr. Natale.

Susan

Ablation January 7th 2003 in Bordeaux. Afib recurred 3 days later so I had a touch up immediately. They found foci at the ostia of the inferior pulmonary veins, and what they said was a particularly toxic focus in the coronary sinus. This was very difficult to find and ablate, and they weren't sure if they had been able to get all of it.

10 days later I had 2 hours of Afib which resolved by itself, and have been in NSR since then, no medication.

I still get a lot of ectopic beats and I wonder if they come from the remains of that focus in the coronary sinus. 6 months post ablation Pr. Haissaguerre said that I should forget about them, but in the last year I have been getting bouts of atrial bigeminy as well, which was worrying. I recently emailed Bordeaux about it and they don't seem to think it's a problem - they suggested taking magnesium to see if it helps, and said that it didn't require medication if there was no AF.

Gill

Hans - I think this is a great idea and I also believe you should clarify that your Bordeaux ablation was the second one for you. I think it would help others with first ablations having difficulties to realize that a second is frequently in order. As I recall after your first, you did all the remedies we talk about, but to no avail. Sometimes, one just has to give in and go for the second ablation. Glad you're doing so well after the second.

For the record, I had my ablation with Dr. Natale in Cleveland 11/03 after an 8 year afib career. I had no difficulties with ectopy or any such problems until 103 days, and I went into afib and had to be cardioverted at 39 hours. I had one very slight run (about 20 minutes) about 10 days later and nothing since. Off all meds. Heart is calm.

That said, I took my magnesium, potassium and taurine to the hospital and took it the minute I was free to move around after the six-hour stint lying flat. (Of course I didn't let the staff know I was taking it). I kept taking the higher doses the whole time post ablation, but became lax and I think that contributed to the lapse into AF at 103 days. I had been off drugs at 2 months.

Naturally, I'm still on my same regimen and don't intend to change from that because after the cardioversion, I was left with what they diagnosed as Sinus Tachycardia.... a series of about 6 - 8 very rapid beats and then NSR. When I don't keep up potassium, I'll feel the ST. Not a big deal, but I'd prefer not to notice any ectopy at all. They say once my thyroid normalizes, I may not continue with the ST. The thyroid malfunction was also a result of the ablation...apparently happens in some people who have surgery.

All in all. My heart is fine, thanks to Dr. Natale.

Jackie

1. December 1998 - diagnosed as permanently in AFIB. Problem was spotted during a routine medical at work. I had felt increasingly bad for a few months - but put it down to work-related stress.
 2. Cardioversion by electric shock - but reverted to AFIB within a week.
 3. Started a 6 year regime of various drugs but reverted to permanent afib in May 2005. Could not be controlled by drugs anymore.
 4. Ablation in Bordeaux in Mid October 2005.
 5. Holter - test in December, no afib detected.
 6. Will have another Holter next week.
 7. So far, have been feeling great - though have been experiencing some missed beats. These appear to be reducing.
- I have only had one ablation procedure and I was a permanent Afibber.

JohnW

JohnW, please tell us how long did the procedure last, were you under deep sedation ?

John C

JohnC

I posted a complete report about my visit on the bulletin board. If you do a search on my username you'll find it.

But to answer your question -
Procedure started at 1pm, precisely - with the insertion of the catheters.

Finished at 515pm with the removal of the catheters.

I was totally awake at the beginning. As the procedure proceeded I took on board hynoval/morphine. This was managed by me saying "pain" whenever I felt some.

I remember feeling quite groggy at some point - but something was sprayed under my tongue and this brought me round.

At the end of the procedure I was fairly alert again.

Regards

JohnW

Jackie,

You are absolutely correct I should have mentioned that my first ablation here in Victoria in December 2005 was a failure. It actually made things worse. So I jumped at the chance to have the second one in Bordeaux nine months ago.

Hans

One problem I have had since the ablation is ectopic beats, and I just got the results of a holter done in December. I compared this with a holter done pre-ablation but in NSR, and another done 3 months post ablation. There was no AF, but the increase in the number of 'premature normals' is alarming -

October 2000, pre ablation, in NSR - 593
April 2003, 3 months post ablation, in NSR - 35
December 2005, 3 yrs post ablation, in NSR - 5915

Should I be worried? Will they continue to increase? What will happen next?

I don't yet have a full copy of the latest holter, but when I do I shall email Bordeaux again to ask for advice. I have begun experimenting with magnesium and potassium but it's too early yet to say what is happening - I haven't noticed a dramatic improvement but I started with low doses and am gradually increasing. I also haven't added taurine yet.

Gill

Gill,

I think you very badly need magnesium and potassium. Please consider magnesium infusions.

Hans

This has truly been an "annus horribilis" for me - to borrow from Queen Elizabeth.

I decided to have an ablation, because I had two minor TIA's from atrial fibrillation in March 2006 and was hospitalized for five days.

(At the time they occurred, I was having afib every night for a week, was under stress, and was not taking blood thinners or aspirin) I was a "young" appearing, so I am told, physically- fit 69 year old, who didn't think that such a thing could happen to her! What a frightening experience it was. However, I was fortunate because they were very transient and I suffered no permanent damage. I don't tolerate drugs well and didn't want to risk more TIA's, therefore an ablation was the way to go. Although I had been on his waiting list, I couldn't wait for Dr. Natale and so I decided to go to Boston.

My ablation was performed at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston on June 6, 2006 following about fifteen years of atrial fibrillation, which had grown progressively worse. I was on Norpace, Metoprolol and Coumadin for three months before the ablation.

Two days after the ablation when I was home, I developed a retroperitoneal hematoma from Lovenox injections, not from a femoral vein puncture (so I was told), which caused me to bleed internally. When I was admitted to the hospital in the middle of the night in excruciating pain, my hematocrit was 17 (normal is 34). I almost bled to death internally. Emergency vascular surgery at 2 AM at UMass Memorial Hospital in Worcester saved my life. (The vascular surgeon said that when I went into surgery, I had about two hours to live) I was in afib during the surgery and on and off again afterwards during my five days in the hospital.

I spent most of the summer recovering from the surgery. I had shortness of breath climbing stairs and walking from the ablation for about three months. I was on Norpace and Metoprolol for three months following surgery.

At the end of the three months I tried going off the medications and on the eleventh day at half the dose I went into afib. I was put back on Norpace and Metoprolol.

Now six months later I have been off medication for eleven days. I am waiting to hear the results of a holter monitor which I requested because I am experiencing daily discomfort below the rib cage - i.e., like a pinched nerve impulse (vagus or phrenic?) compounded from being blocked...hard to describe! Brenda described it well as "walking around

with the feeling of being punched in the stomach. Since going off the Norpace my digestion has been awful (food sits undigested in my stomach for 5-6 hours), whereas when I took Norpace it was excellent...! My guess is that Norpace slows up the digestive process: saliva production and bowel function impairment is documented and probably stomach acid secretion is involved.

I am taking magnesium and potassium supplements and am also on the V-8 regimen.

To my knowledge no afib so far, but the holter monitor should tell what is going on.

Hope that this isn't too long winded...

Carol Andrews

Hello Everyone,

Thanks for sharing your post ablation problems. Could you please also tell us what type of medications you were on after the ablation. I very much like to know if the a-fib episodes that you experienced after the ablation could be prevented by taking the right antiarrhythmic drugs. I know that for successful ablations, the post-ablation episodes occur because the heart is in an agitated state for a couple of months as the heart heals from the burns. Could antiarrhythmic drugs stop such episodes?

Thanks,
Shaun

As if that post wasn't too long -

For the record I should add:

- 1) The retroperitoneal hematoma that nearly cost me my life was diagnosed (labelled) as a "spontaneous bleed," from the Lovenox; i.e. not related to a femoral vein puncture from the ablation
- 2) The ectopics that I experienced after the ablation have been pretty well controlled by Magnesium, K glycinate supplements and v-8 juice.
- 3) In addition to the "punched in the stomach," sensitized nerve syndrome* that I mentioned earlier, I wake up every night with frequent bouts of tachycardia during what appears to be the dreaming phase of sleep - from about 3:30 AM on.

I have no diagnoses for either of the latter two symptoms. The EP thinks it is related to the Norpace, which he said I should stop. I don't think that it is.

Carol

*the sensitized nerve feels like an electrical impulse is "looping" back (from the heart?) and concentrating in my diaphragm. Hard to describe it.

What about behaviour post ablation, must known triggers be avoided - initially - or long term? Can a successful ablation open the door to a normal life without fear of - for example a cup of coffee, a few glasses of wine, a vigorous uphill cycle ride, a hearty meal etc ?

JohnC

Hi Gordon,

I'd check out a radioactive iodine shot to get off the Tapazole. I had a cat with hyperthyroidism & he was on Tapazole, but I later learned that it really isn't for long-term use, so had him treated with the iodine & the results were much better than the Tapazole.

George

In addition to Johns questions I would like to know if post ablationists who were previously afflicted with GERD symptoms still have them? Or to put it another way, does having an ablation have a positive effect on GERD?

Adrian

Update to my second conference post:

I described the "punched in the stomach" and excessive, almost manic and uncontrollable bursts of energy that started developing at about 4 PM, when I was being weaned off Norpace six months post - ablation to my Primary Care doctor today. During these times my heart beat is very fast.

He is not sure what is causing it, but thinks that I am having huge surges of adrenalin release during the diurnal periods of vagal dominance.

I agree with him.

It is possible that the vagus nerve has been damaged from the ablation and is not counterbalancing the sympathetic adrenal branch as it should.

It is also possible that the Norpace, which suppresses the vagal response, has incapacitated the vagal nerve or response; this vagal activity normally keeps the adrenalin response in check.

He put me on 25 mg. slow release Toprol to try to hold back the adrenalin response.

(When I was in his office this morning, I could feel the adrenalin rush and my heart beat measured 180).

He said that his mother has afib and that he would not recommend an ablation for her, because from all that he could , read, hear and see "ablations made sense theoretically, but were rarely successful. And, he said, you usually ended up with having to deal with problems like the ones I have.

Carol

What about behaviour post ablation, must known triggers be avoided - initially - or long term? Can a successful ablation open the door to a normal life without fear of - for example a cup of coffee, a few glasses of wine, a vigorous uphill cycle ride, a hearty meal etc ?

=====

I think that would be variable from person to person. In my case.

1. I don't drink coffee anyway, for other reasons and didn't before the AFib.
2. Wine would be okay, but I don't drink and didn't drink any alcoholic beverages - for other reasons - before the AFib.
3. I do plenty of vigorous uphill cycle rides with absolutely no problem. I lift weights, run a bit (I don't love running), use the stair-stepper vigorously.

4. I definitely eat hearty meals!

My life is absolutely as it was before the AFib. In other words, normal.

I take one adult aspirin a day - that is it. But I likely would if I hadn't had the AFib and/or ablation, anyway.

Denver Fox

I notice a posting on the bulletin board from Jim - re stenosis following a Natale ablation. Like Jim, I thought stenosis was rare these days - especially with a practitioner as renowned as Dr Natale. Can anyone add any words of wisdom?

JohnC

Carol suggested I post my experience

I've been in perm afib for 7 yrs. I have gone thru all the graduated interventions w/out any change in afib -- meds, cardio verts, acupuncture, and 6 months ago an RF ablation. I have had complication from everything: I can't tolerate the beta blockers, they act like knock-out drops and I have to lay down. Amiodarone has permanently damaged my ability to see at night. Given the enlargement w/my heart cardio verts would not be effective, acupuncture treatment reduced the premature heartbeats I get, but I remain in afib.

There were complications from the ablation related to infection & I had pneumonia a few weeks after surgery. My ablation was 7 hrs, was in NSR for just a few hrs after the procedure. I was cardioverted at least 3 times during the ablation. I cannot say for sure whether my digestive issues were present prior to the ablation, but occasionally I get something like acid reflux that bothers me, but I can't say it's painful.

I took Amiodarone for 3 months after the ablation. It was yuck, bad taste in my mouth, extra tired and the vision issue. After my 3 month ck up I was off of it and suggested I just Toprol or Cardia PRN -- I rarely use either as it's not worth the onslaught of nap-time that the meds produce.

I'm going for the Wolf mini-maze in a couple of weeks. I was in pretty good shape when I was first diagnosed, in my late 40s, fairly physically active and even after first diagnosed it was a year before I started to get exhausted, panting, vertigo-like episodes. So now starts another venture into a procedure that is becoming more invasive, I'm hoping it works.

SamD

Well I just had a Holter test this week and things look good.

No AFIB and extra systoles significantly reduced.

Here is a comparison with the 1 month post ablation -

ExtraSystoles Atrial Ventricle
1 month 802 785
3 month 442 81

I expect to get the OK to stop Sintrom (Warfarin). When I do this it will be the first time in 7 years I won't be taking pills every day.

JohnW

Sorry for not posting sooner, but I have been fighting a very nasty chest cold.

I had my procedure last Sept. 20th, in Bordeaux. During the procedure an accidental tamponade occurred during

removal of the catheter. One week later I had a few very short runs of afib lasting only minutes. Over the next five weeks I had about three more short runs of afib. Healing for me came quite slowly. I returned to work after six weeks, and have been afib free since Nov. 1st. I still have the odd missed beat, and hopefully they will stop soon. Professor Haissaguerre noticed I had some calcification happening, and suggested I have a stress test after recovery. Last Fri. I had a stress test done as well as an MPI scan. After getting my heart rate up to 159 bpm they injected a radioactive material, which settles in your heart. During the next twenty minutes they take many pictures. I am a bit concerned because of family history. I had an angiogram done ten years ago, which turned out fine. I think I may have the afib problem licked, which in itself is a wonderful thing.

Thanks, Lou
