

Pat's Heart Valve Story

In 2006, Patricia had a brief problem with heart palpitations, which acted as a red flag and prompted her to go and see her GP for a stethoscope check. Ten years on here is her story:

I was 55 when an incident of alarming palpitations revealed the reason I felt less than 100 per cent. My heart had been compensating for a defective mitral valve and was getting tired of the extra work. This particular valve was 'leaky' and is known as mitral valve regurgitation. I'd grown accustomed to my annoyingly random heart-beat, and as for feeling less energetic, wishing I could doze off during the day and being a bit breathless during aerobics, I blamed the stresses of everyday life.

After an ECG at my GP's surgery I was referred to the specialist Valve Clinic at the North West Heart Centre. I was told to watch out for the time when everyday tasks became greater challenges. "Tell us as soon as it happens", my specialist nurse told me. This would be the optimum time for treatment and give me the prospect of a longer, more zestful life.

Sooner than expected, my condition worsened and the hospital called: I could have my operation the next day! And so on my sixty-second birthday, our National Health Service and Dr James Barnard of the North West Heart Centre gave me the special gift of mitral valve repair.

I walked down to theatre in the afternoon and opened my eyes four hours later. I don't remember feeling pain, discomfort or anxiety, but I had a real thirst! Superb nursing eased me through the first hours of recovery in a state-of-the-art ward equipped with technology worthy of Star Trek's USS Enterprise. Four days later I was discharged.

With perseverance, I gradually extended the length of my daily walks and began to seek out therapies that would make me feel better physically and psychologically.

Be aware of symptoms that slow you down, worry or impair you; breathlessness, irregular heartbeat or palpitations, light-headedness, dizziness, lethargy, fatigue. Don't assume that you are "feeling your age" – whatever that may be.

The more we listen, the more lives we save.

