

## Archie Taylor

89-year-old Bedfordview resident, Mr Archie Taylor, is South Africa's longest surviving ICD patient. He has been using Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillators (ICD) since a near-fatal episode in 1990.

Mr Taylor, father to three, grandfather to eight and great-



"You have an irregular, catchy heartbeat."

grandfather to eight, was diagnosed with arrhythmia, a heart condition characterized by irregular heart rhythm caused by irregular electrical conduction in the heart, which can be fatal.

"Although no South African statistics are currently available, extrapolated statistics from American figures suggest that approximately 30 000 to 50 000 South Africans die from this commonly unidentified and frequently misdiagnosed disease every year," commented electrophysiologist, Professor Okreglicki, a member of PACE, which is an organisation that aims to create awareness of arrhythmia.

An ICD is a heart device containing a small computer that

is powered by a tiny lithium battery. All the electronic components are sealed inside a metal case made of titanium. The device is designed to monitor heart rate and deliver immediate treatment for any irregular heart rhythms when necessary. ICDs improve quality of life and give patients a sense of security. The devices need to be replaced every four to seven years. The devices are becoming consistently smaller and the operations similarly less invasive as medical technology advances.

The Medtronic ICDs (five in total now) implanted in Mr Taylor by Dr Pro Obel, an electrophysiologist based at Millpark Clinic, administer a 750 volt shock when

the tiny device picks up a disturbance in heart rhythm.

"It feels like you have been hit in the chest with a hammer but if it were not for the ICDs I would have been gone 20 years ago," said Mr Taylor. Mr Taylor's life has been saved time and time again, not to mention extended, because of the devices. Mr Taylor has received a total of 17 shocks since 1990. Mr Taylor spends time in his workshop fixing and creating various gadgets and contraptions for friends at St George's Village, the retirement village in Bedfordview where he lives. He is also a keen photographer and develops his own photographs in his darkroom.

## Living with an Implantable Defibrillator

### What Is Normal?

Many people with implantable defibrillators wonder whether their own experiences with arrhythmias and an implantable heart device are "normal." Some report that they constantly monitor their heart rate and think about What Is Normal? Some report that they constantly monitor their heart rate and think about their device every day.

Others say that they seldom think about either their heart condition or their implantable defibrillator. Further, some people with implantable heart devices focus on the future and others say that thinking about the future is difficult for them. When it comes to adjusting to your heart condition, your implantable defibrillator, and your beliefs about the future, what is "normal" for you?



## Here are 9 KEYS for shaping positive adjustment when you receive your implant Device:

### 1 Accept

Work to accept the pros and cons of the implantable defibrillator and develop a hopeful attitude about your future.

### 2 Believe!

Know that research indicates that the quality of life for people with implantable defibrillators is at least equal, and, often, is better than quality of life for those who take anti-arrhythmic medications.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 Resolve Concerns

You might have about your bodily appearance with your heart device.

### 4 Learn Coping Strategies

that help soothe your psychological distress. Key here is to dismiss negative thinking. Avoid imagining worst-case scenarios. Remind yourself that most people with implantable defibrillators view them as overwhelmingly positive.

### 5 Remind Yourself

The implantable defibrillator increases your safety from irregular heartbeats. It will serve as a "lifeguard" if you need it.

### 6 Make Plans for a Full Life

Take inventory of the activities that you enjoy and are meaningful, and discuss plans to return to those

### 7 Learn

Increase your knowledge about your device and your heart condition.

### 8 Plan

Develop steps you will take if you receive a lifesaving shock.

### 9 Communicate

Communicate questions and concerns with your doctor and family.