

Happy days travelling with warfarin



BY GILL RANSON

My name is Gill and I am 69 years old. In December 2009 I was admitted to Brighton Hospital where I underwent an operation for the replacement of my Aortic Heart valve with a mechanical one. Now, of course I am on warfarin for the rest of my life. I also had a pacemaker inserted.

All went well with the operation and I was discharged during the early part of January 2010. I then went on to attend the eight week Cardiac Rehab classes at Southlands Hospital and attended my GP's practice every 2-4 weeks for INR blood levels to be checked by the local Hospital, mine being under the control of Haematology at St Richards, Chichester.

My recovery progressed very well without any complications but as my husband and I have always enjoyed travelling the world we could see that one thing was holding us back from travelling again. This was having to attend for regular INR checks at the GP's surgery.

In early 2011, we produced a 'business plan' to present to my GP. I realised that going 'long haul' would be difficult with the regime of needing blood tests so frequently. For example going to New Zealand would mean I would have to contact a GP there, then be referred for a blood test and to return to the GP for the result, this could mean a possible 10 day turnaround and by that time I may be several thousand miles away!

I went to see my Anti Coag team at St Richards Hospital to ask them if I would be a suitable candidate to self-test, they agreed, so I took the 'business



These photos were taken on a holiday to Vietnam last October/November. We travelled firstly to Hanoi, then on a cruise for 2 weeks on a small river boat with 14 passengers up inlets close to the Chinese border. This was called an expedition on the Red River. It was fantastic. We finished our holiday in Ho Chi Minh City. Away for 3 weeks on this occasion. First picture is me with a couple of local youngsters who had demonstrated their dancing skills and dragged me in at the end. Second picture was our last night in Ho Chi Minh City before our overnight flight back to UK.

plan' to my GP to ask him if he would consider prescribing the test strips and the lancets for the Roche test monitor on prescription. I said I would meet him half way and pay for the machine myself. He put this plan to the partners in the practice and I was given the go ahead.

I purchased the CoaguChek XS machine from Roche, who were very helpful. I had guidance at St Richards on usage and with the aid of my husband we started the process that is similar to a diabetic test

procedure. I now test my blood once or twice a week, depending on my levels and then complete a web page, set up by Chichester hospital and return it to them for dosing once a week and they return an email to me the same day. Whilst on holiday I do the return providing I can get Wifi. I always keep Chichester informed of where I am going and how long I will be away, so if my return is late they know I will do it as and when I can.

I have now been self-testing for over five years. It has made a tremendous difference to our lives. All the anxiety about taking warfarin and the change in dosage has gone and every week I know exactly what my blood levels are, giving me peace of mind. I personally feel that my blood is better controlled by my self-testing than patients who attend for INR at clinics and hospitals because of the time lapses that are involved. Chichester request that every 18 weeks I have a full venous blood test done at my GP's and I also do a test at home and both are sent to Chichester on that day to enable cross calibration of machines.

In the last twelve months we have been to Doha and Qatar for three weeks, Vietnam for four weeks, Norway for two weeks, New Zealand and French Polynesia for four and a half weeks and have already booked a trip to Burma for the later part of this year.

The only problem with long hauls is working out the time difference to take my warfarin, but we manage to do that with the aid of my mobile phone. I have my alarm set every day to alert me to take my warfarin. I may be sitting enjoying a drink watching the sun set in Australia, watching whales in Alaska but I don't ever forget my warfarin!

HAPPY DAYS ON WARFARIN!