



Ed Kittrell returned to regular exercise after an advanced procedure at NorthShore restored his normal heart rhythm.

He's Got Rhythm

Advanced Cardiovascular Capabilities Restore Patient's Steady Heartbeat

By Barb Hailey

Ed Kittrell said the sedentary nature of his career as a writer motivated him to exercise for an hour a day on a stationary bicycle. But a persistent irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation (A-fib) put the brakes on that routine. It took an advanced procedure known as catheter ablation, performed by NorthShore Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology Westby Fisher, MD, to finally put Kittrell's heart—and his exercise schedule—back on a steady rhythm.

"I began experiencing A-fib in 1996," recalled Kittrell, 64, of Glenview. "I was short of breath and even had episodes where I passed out."

The condition starts in the heart's upper chambers (atria) where a problem with the heart's electrical system causes the atria to tremble, or fibrillate, disturbing its normal rhythm. A-fib increases the risk of

stroke and can lead to heart failure if the rate is not controlled.

Doctors often use medications or low-voltage shock, called cardioversion, to get a person's heartbeat back to a normal rhythm. Kittrell received both. But like many patients, his A-fib returned. His longtime NorthShore internist Mark Ables, MD, referred him to Dr. Fisher, who recommended and performed the catheter ablation in 2011. Dr. Fisher holds an academic appointment at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, and Dr. Ables holds an academic title at the Pritzker School of Medicine.

"Cardioversion was the classic treatment in 2008," said Dr. Fisher. "Ablation is a very complex procedure, but improvements in technology have reduced complication rates to a very acceptable level.

NorthShore has a state-of-the-art electrophysiology lab



Dr. Westby Fisher directs cardiac electrophysiology at NorthShore.

and a very experienced team, so we can offer it as a first-line therapy."

"Dr. Fisher was very good at explaining this bewildering condition," Kittrell added. "And he's very experienced with performing ablations."

In the highly collaborative procedure, a cardiologist and a team of nurses and technicians place catheters—long, thin wires—in the heart through the leg. The catheters locate the A-fib and apply electrical or freezing energy to the heart tissue, blocking the transmission of abnormal electrical impulses.

Kittrell has fully recovered and uses the online Web portal NorthShoreConnect to get timely answers from advanced practice nurses who closely monitor patients before and after the procedure.

"I'm just grateful to be back to exercising like I always did," he said.

NorthShore Joins Forces With Mayo Clinic

Advanced diagnostic techniques, drugs and interventions are continuously being introduced into cardiology and cardiovascular medicine. And now our patients have access to additional expertise on any heart-related disease, thanks to NorthShore's new collaboration with Mayo Clinic.

Under this unique care network, specialists from NorthShore and Mayo Clinic are sharing their knowledge at an even higher level—dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of complex medical conditions, including cardiovascular, neurological and cancer cases. Learn more at northshore.org/mayow13 or call (847) 492-5700 (Ext. 1216).