HWM07 14-Dec-2020 Interview transcript

RB :Ok that's on speaker phone now and my voice recorders are going

HWM07: Ok

RB: So I'll just organise myself here a bit better. Ok. So just to start off with, can you tell me – thanks very much for sending your questionnaires back by the way – there's just one question on the questionnaires that I wanted to go back to which was quality of life today. So if your, if you had to give yourself a score for how good your life is from zero to a hundred with zero being the worst possible life and a hundred being the best possible, where would you say you're at at the moment?

HWM07: Um, well grateful to be alive so I can't give it a zero but um, fifty, I'd say.

RB: Fifty

HWM07: Yeah

RB Bang in the middle

HWM07: Right at this minute in time, yeah. Fifty.

RB: Sure. And what contributes to that fifty? What stops it being a sixty or an eighty – what would have to change?

HWM07: Well, I th… Obviously I've had heart problems and I've put on a lot of weight and I've been out regularly walking and we've moved house so I enjoyed the walking around here, just got into that, and I went into AFib which sort of put an end to all that really. I recently had an ablation which built my hopes up and for a week and a half after that it was fantastic, it was a hundred percent. Um, I could.. no issues, everything normal in life. But unfortunately my heart's gone back into AFib and I'm struggling. Um not only with my heart, I've got a couple of other problems that have occurred which have um, is making life a bit difficult for me. Um, so that why I said fifty really.

RB: Ok. Sure, so all, um, all of that fifty is coming from your AF really.

HWM07: Um, no, ok let's be fair. Sixty, seventy, sixty, seventy, say seventy with the AFib then. Sorry I've got plantar fasciitis come back so it's really painful and I'm really struggling to walk anywhere. I enjoy walking so I'm in trouble. And at the same time I've got – I can't remember what it's called now – coccyx something-or-other, so it's painful to sit down…

RB: Oh you're in a bad way! You can't walk, you can't sit down!

HWM07: …I can't stand up, I can't sit down, so life's a little bit miserable at the moment.

RB: Yeah it doesn't sound great

HWM07: Nothing to do with AFib really.

RB: Right, no. But everything contributes doesn't it?

HWM07: Yes. I think it does. Yes.

RB: Moving back to your AFib, can you tell me a little bit about that? Can you tell me how it started?

HWM07: Um, I don't know exactly when it started. I had a heart attack, um, I had a little heart attack then I had some stents put in and everything was fine. Then few years ago, think it was two and half years ago I had quite a big heart attack, and I noticed things had changed after that. It was about six months after that things were getting a little bit worse and went to the doctors' and they said yeah your heart's gone into AFib. So that's how it started. Couple of years ago.

RB: Right. So when you say things were getting a little bit worse what was happening that made you go to the doctor?

HWM07: Um the fact that I was landscape gardening for um, I retired from the fire service on health reasons but I started a little job doing landscape gardening and um it was great when I started but I was starting to.. I was getting out of breath really quickly and started to think blimey even though I'm walking as far as I can and doing what I'm doing I seem to be getting more and more unfit. Um. And making love was a waste of time, at the time, so um, thought it was time to go and see a doctor. I went to see a doctor and straight away put a thing on my a heart, a stethoscope, said yeah your heart's in AFib.

RB: Right

HWM07: Go home, sit down, don't do anything.

RB: Right. And did they refer you then to a cardiologist?

HWM07: Yes, yeah. I waited some time…

RB: And when did this start? Sorry. When did this start?

HWM07: Oh I'm not very good with dates. I'm guessing two years ago. Roughly.

RB: Two years. And then when you went to see the cardiologist, what happened with them?

HWM07: Um they put me forward for a cardioversion which unfortunately took, um, I can't remember how long but must have been a good nine to twelve months. Um til I finally got a cardioversion. And that was great, and worked well for a few weeks, and then it went back into AFib. Um, had another cardioversion, that worked well for a short while. Um then they put me on amiodarone and I was absolutely fantastic, been good ever since. And then recently I went for my ablation, and I come out my ablation and a week and a half later back in AFib.

RB: Right. Yeah. And you're not taking amiodarone any more?

HWM07: I am now yes, obviously because recently I've got back to the doctor, the cardiologist who said get straight back onto amiodarone and we'll get you back in to do a cardioversion.

RB: Right, so go.. do you feel a little bit like you're going round in circles perhaps?

HWM07: Yes. Oh gosh yes. This'll be my third or fourth cardioversions.

RB: Right. Just tell me, when you first went into AF you obviously weren't really aware of it because you just felt breathless. Now are you aware when you're in AF?

HWM07: Yes. I know. It's at night, it worse at night, I notice it, um if I roll over in bed I sort of take a couple of seconds to get my breath back. If I wake up and go out for a wee and then come back I'm laid there trying to get my breath, wondering why am I so out of breath you know, I'm not, um.. So yeah I do, I know straight away now.

RB: And do you still work?

HWM07: Um, no.

RB: And is that, is that. .you said you were landscape gardening, did you have to pack that up?

HWM07: Oh yeah I packed that in because I had qu.. my last heart attack I was in the middle of doing somebody's lawn actually, and that was it. I come home and said – it was quite a life-changer for me. So I said ok, I retired from the fire service for a reason, let's just stay retired.

RB: Sure.

HWM07: I do keep myself occupied. I've got a friend who I go and help a couple of times a week. I do a little, got a hobby that I do. I don't take up any kind of "work" work now

RB: Right. You just, yeah you keep yourself busy though.

HWM07: Yes. Try to.

RB: You said you got quite into walking as well – what, when did you get into walking?

HWM07: Uh, no, I said that - lot of people think of walking as walking. Um no – I, we used to go for a couple of miles' walk every night just round the block and round the estates and all that and we used to do that regularly when I was in the fire service just to get me out the house and away from the telly to be honest. Um then when I had the heart problems the wife would go to work and I'd get up and then I'd start my day off by going for a walk around the neighbourhood. And I used to do, I don't know, mile and a half, two miles, depending how I felt , every single morning. And then um I just couldn't do it. We moved to where we're at now which is quite a hilly little place, which is no issue normally but now I struggle [laughs] by the time I get to the top of the hill, which is why I come home. So that kind of dwindled out.

RB: Yeah, I understand. Ok. So moving on to your weight now, because as you know this study's about the connection between AF and weight, um

HWM07: Yes

RB: And how those two things play into each other. Can you tell me a little bit about your weight? Have you always been overweight or has it been something that's come on..

HWM07: Yes yes, I've maintained sixteen stone for most of my life. I'm a big bloke, I'm 6'4, I've been active in the fire service and doing martial arts and stuff. But I've always maintained at 16 stone. Um, I was a heavy drinker for years, didn't matter how much I drank I stayed at 16 stone. Um then in my

last few years in the fire service I bloated right up to twenty.. just over twenty stone. Um, just eating junk food, because I was working away. And then I woke up one morning and just thought "I've had enough" so I joined Slimming World and no, before I joined Slimming World I lost two stone on my own accord, got down to 18 stone on my own accord just changing my diet. Then I joined Slimming World and got down to 15 and a half, which was ridiculous for a bloke my size really. Um and I kept that up for three years. And now it's just gone way back up, 18 and a half stone. I fluctuate to 18, I'm probably 18 and a half now. Um and I.. you get.. I can't do much about it. I find myself sitting around most of the time. Can't go out doing exercise. Um. Right now, well, it's Christmas, I gave up to be honest. [laughs] What's the point? Mince pies, shortbread.

RB: So going back to when you were in the fire service and you changed your diet, what changes did you make and how easy was it for you to do?

HWM07: Um, it's a really sad story, really stupid really. A friend of mine I was talking to, well that's when I first started suffering from angina, and I got chatting to a friend of mine and he'd had a heart attack and blah blah blah and he suggested reading this book called The China Study – I don't know if you've read it or know anything about it?

RB: I haven't, no. Tell me about it.

HWM07: Well, it's an amazing book where professors and people in your position, professionals from across the world have done studies about the Eastern diet, and the Mediterranean diet and compared it to our diet, and how everything in the book is backed up with tons and tons of evidence, so it's not something you just read and think "That's rubbish" because if you keep reading it the evidence is there and you can't argue with it. They've managed, in lots of cases they've managed to reverse heart disease blah blah blah. So their diet's completely different to ours but some of the things that were bad for me that.. I was a massive cheese eater, I was everything, a pint of milk every night, um, so I just went and thought I tell you what I don't need milk in my tea, I don't need sug.. well I never had sugar anyway but I don't need milk in my tea or my coffee. So I basically cut out all my dairy food. And um, also started watching what I was eating – salts and sugars and all the usual things, and as much plant-based diet as I could. Bearing in mind I eat meat and I love.. like most normal people as well. And I managed to.. yeah, the weight just dropped of me.

RB: Mmm. And just tell me a little bit about your home situation. Are you, do you live on your own or..

HWM07: No, no I'm married. Daughter's moved away now, just me and the wife.

RB: But you said you were working away at the time when you bloated up..

HWM07: Yeah yeah yeah, I was in the fire service, got promoted to Watch Manager in a little place called [town name] – don't know if you know it?

RB: Yes I do, I'm from the West Country, I'm from [nearby place name]

HWM07: Oh cool. But yeah [town name] they don't do a shift system like most fire service, it was four days on and four days off. So four days and four nights. So you'd go in and you're basically there for can't remember how many hours it was before you come home.

RB: Ok, so during those four days when you were away from home you were tending to eat pretty unhealthily?

HWM07: Oh mate! I can't cook to.. I'd burn water! [Both laughing] So at the back of the fire station there was an array of takeaways. And it was much easier to walk round, grab a pizza, stop at the pub for a pint and come back to the station.

RB: Were you wor.. I mean I presume you were working with other…

HWM07: …[Laughing] Oooh it was a tough old job!

RB: You were working with other people then so would that be a group thing you would do together?

HWM07: Um, to a degree yeah. There was only two or three of us stayed on at night, in the evenings, and depending who stayed sometimes we'd cook and other nights we'd say ah, let's takeaway it. And you know, I was a big guy, and one takeaway's not enough for me – or wasn't at the time.

RB: Right, so you were having two or three dishes were you?

HWM07: I was a young lad, I was active and I could eat a family pizza quite easily.

RB: Right, yeah, yeah, I've got you

HWM07: Just being honest

RB: No, that's great! I mean, if I had space I would eat a family pizza myself but I really don't think I could fit it in to be honest with you

HWM07: No, I couldn't touch it now.

RB: So then when you were home, were you eating healthily during this period?

HWM07: Yeah. To be fair, yeah. Well, yes and no, we were kind of, but I tended to bring the Slimming World stuff home with me if you like. I'm on at the missus, until she changed, um, this that and the other, she took some training.

RB: Right ok! [laughing] So how did she feel about being asked to change all her cooking and stuff?

HWM07: Oh, g.. I don't know. She was very supportive – that's all I'm going to say.

RB: Sure. But you said you had to moan at her..

HWM07: Constantly, yeah. She'd put summink down and I'd look at it and think aw that's lush, but I wouldn't tell her that. So I'd sit there are go yeah, yeah, and how many sins are in this? And why did you put that on it? Don't really need that on it, and this kind of thing – secretly knowing that it looks lush.

RB: I'm sure it did – that's the thing, when you cut out all the nice bits… all the fattening bits, it's not quite so nice is it. But how did she react to that, did she..?

HWM07: Oh she supported great, yeah, no issues at all, we changed. I think it helped her as much as it did me to be honest.

RB: Yeah, sure. Why was she putting those bits on, does it.. was it because she wanted them or..

HWM07: That's normal stuff. Do you know what I mean, it's normal stuff. Like you have a Sunday dinner, on goes the apple sauce and the mint sauce, you know, pile of spuds. And I would sit there and go, oh, do you know how many sins there are in apples sauce? You know, you don't need mint sauce everywhere, just a little bit there and you don't need all these potatoes. Yorkshire puddings are massive in sins. I'm a bit obsessed! But I done it for just over three years. And I done really well at it, you know? So I didn't want to come home and have to ruin all my good work just for the sake of an evening meal.

RB: So it was really just a question of her getting used to what was a sin and what wasn't?

HWM07: Honest.. Yeah, it's the old fashioned educating isn't it? I mean educating your mind. We were old-fashioned eaters, we would just go and eat stuff. Um whereas now we think about what we eat now. Even to this day.

RB: Yeah.

HWM07: Says the man who's just sat down and ate four mince pies [laughing]

RB: Well like you say, it is Christmas coming.

HWM07: Yeah.

RB: But generally you think you're a bit more mindful about what you eat now?

HWM07: Oh we are, definitely we are, yeah yeah yeah. Me personally, I've just given up because it's Christmas and I know we can't do much this next couple of weeks, and I know for a fact I can be quite disciplined when I put my mind to something I do it, and I know for a fact January the first I'll be.. well everybody diets after Christmas don't they but I've got a good reason to and I know I will, so.. Right this minute in time, there's mince pies to be ate.

RB: So you're treating yourself at the minute and then you're going to have a lean January.

HWM07: Absolutely.

RB: Sure, sure. Do you consider that you've got quite good self-discipline? You mentioned that you used to do martial arts…

HWM07: Yeah, yeah

RB: Do you think that's quite.. do you think.. are those two things connected, the self-discipline of eating and the martial arts?

HWM07: Um, no. No. It's probably.. well a lot of my self-discipline comes down to my upbringing and fire service. Fire service is very militarised you know..

RB: Ok

HWM07: Or it was in our day, it's changed now a little bit. But in our days it was a very disciplined service.

RB: Yeah, Yeah.

HWM07: Um, and also, like I said, the way I was brought up I guess. In a good way, not a bad way.

RB: Sure, yeah yeah. So were you brought up, with your diet, were you brought up to be quite careful with your diet or not really?

HWM07: So not not really, totally the opposite, totally the opposite. It's put in front of you, you don't leave it. There's starving kids in Africa, no, you eat it. Which taught me a lesson because my first daughter was the same. You know, no, you're not leaving the table until you've eaten it. And then when you get wise, you think this is ridiculous so my second daughter was completely different, she was, if you can't eat it babe just leave it. Er, which I believe is how we should have been brought up in the first place, but we weren't, I suppose.

RB: Sure, oh that's really interesting actually, that you think yeah, being…

HWM07: My parents didn't have a lot of money, things were hard to get hold of in those days. They worked hard to put food on the table and it doesn't look good if some.. So we were brought up to clear your plates, can't leave the table until you've cleared you plates. And it was all wholesome food, good old-fashioned country cooking if you like.

RB: Yeah, Oh that's really interesting. Um has any health care professionals ever spoken to you about your weight?

HWM07: Um, not really, well.. I've had two courses, I went on two courses following my heart attack and my angina stuff which were NHS courses which were really good, um , I think it was one day a week, half a day in a classroom where they teach you about nutrition and all sorts of stuff and, hand on heart, really interesting, and half a day in the gym. Which was great but after six weeks it all comes to an end and that's it.

RB: Right. Do you feel like you would have benefitted from staying on a bit longer?

HWM07: Yeah I did ask about if I could keep carry on using the gym but it was a little local um university that they used that they hired a gym out of. Um, to be fair I used the gym at work at the fire station which is less than a mile away from me, they got a fantastic gymnasium so I used that for several years and when I retired I said could I carry on using the gym and they said no.

RB: Oh.

HWM07: You're not insured. And it's like, fire fighters have been doing that all my career but it's oh we got a new chief, a new.. it's all run differently the fire service so, it's no, you're not insured, you can't come in and use the gym. I think, oh thanks.

RB: And do you have any other facilities round where you are that you can use?

HWM07: Er, not without spending lots of money. I was quite happy just going out for a walk and getting out of breath a few times a week.

RB: Yeah. Pushing yourself that little bit.

HWM07: Yeah, Yeah.

RB: Ok. And your GP's never offered you any, any.. when you ballooned up your GP didn't mention it, or..

HWM07: No, no – who mentioned it, sorry?

RB: GP

HWM07: No. Well if he, gosh, every time I visited him he'd be, said you could do with losing some weight. I just got used to that. Er the problem I got, is because I'm a big geezer, I went up to twenty and a half stone, and you probably wouldn't notice. It's a bit strange because I'm quite tall and quite muscly if you like, or was, and it's not like I carry it all on my.. I do now carry it on my belly, but in those days I didn't carry it all on my belly, I just looked like a big rugby player and that's the way I've looked all my life. Um, so people would look at you and they would know whether you were 16 stone or 20 stone.

RB: Were you happy with the way you looked?

HWM07: Oh god no. Is anybody?

RB: How would you have liked to look?

HWM07: Um I like being big and muscly, all that stuff but when the belly's.. I've always had quite a big belly - oh I call it a beer belly but I don't believe it is beer – um, I just didn't carrying the weight around my belly I suppose, that was the bit I didn't like. Everything else I was confident about, but typical man with a beer belly. My missus says I'm obsessed because it's not really that big, but to me it is.

RB: You're aware of it.

HWM07: Yeah, course you are.

RB: So when the GP says to you "you could do with losing some weight", do they just drop it into the conversation like that or have they ever offered you any assistance with that?

HWM07: No, it was always just well you could do with losing a bit of weight. I used to have problems with my knees which I put down to martial arts or volleyball, and doctor's yeah you'd be better off if you lost a bit of weight. And it just got tiring after a while, every single year, whatever I.. if I went there with toothache he'd have told me to lose some weight. So it just got a bit tiring and it just went in one ear and out the other. I just thought whatever, easy for you to say mate.

RB: Would that have been different if they'd said, you could do with losing some weight, I'm going to refer you to somebody?

HWM07: Yeah, course it would, or if it had given you, I don't know, a little bit more explanation or education, or made life easier for you. It's not.. I never found it easy to lose weight. Hardest, and I

can say this quite easily, one of the hardest things – and I mean I've had a helluva life – one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life was to walk into that Slimming World hall. On my own.

RB: Really?

HWM07: Yeah that was incre.. that was one of my biggest battles in the world. I come out that night feeling proud I'd cracked walking in to a Slimming World hall full of women and saying look, I need to lose some weight. A bit like an alcoholic just admitting he's an alcoholic I suppose.

RB: What was so hard about it? What stopped you before that?

HWM07: Um, I .. what's that five, six years ago now, Not many people used Slimming World did they then? Not many men, sorry. I mean Christ I'm an ex fire fighter and it wasn't the macho thing to go to Slimming World or any of these slimming clubs and all that stuff, is it

RB: Sure, so it was really.. you felt it was more for women really?

HWM07: Of course it was. Yeah, I mean ten years ago it was. Without a shadow of a doubt. I mean when I joined it I was the only chap there, and then somebody else came along about a year later, and within months I thought blimey there's quite a few blokes here now.

RB: Oh there, you're a pioneer then!

HWM07: No. I wouldn't have thought so [laughing]. It's just the area I suppose. Yeah, just never crossed my mind, it wasn't a bloke's place to go to a slimming club and walk into a hall full of ladies, dunno, it just wasn't me. But I ended up loving it.

RB: What, what made you go there? Because you said you lost quite a lot of weight prior to that just by changing your diet on your own…

HWM07: Yeah I got down to 18 stone – I think I was just under 21 to be honest – and I got down to 18 stone just by changing my diet and going into the gym at work more, which I used to do every day, um, and I was chuffed to bits with that. But I come to a standstill where I just couldn't get past 18 stone. And I thought there must be more to that than that. And my sister-in-law, she was quite a chunky lady and she done brilliant at Sliming World, and she said to me why don't you come along with me. And I thought well ok, will do.

RB: Good for you, yep. And that just got you..

HWM07: [Laughing] Wasn't that good – she didn't turn up! [Both laugh] Hence the reason I's sat in the car park watching all these ladies going in. I got a text from her saying she can't make it, and I'm going.. shall I turn round and go home? And I watched about 50 women go in this hall and I thought, you know what? Sod it, I'm here now. She was good after that, she turned up.

RB: Sounds like it did you good anyway.

HWM07: Yeah, it was great.

RB: So when you've been to see the cardiologist have they talked to you about weight at all?

HWM07: Um yeah like I said when I first had my angina, when they did the stents I did a course, 6 week course I think it was which was absolutely fantastic. Um, then I came away and kept pretty fit to be honest with the landscaping and going for a walk everyday. Kept me weight quite reasonable. Then I had me.. what happened then, why did I sto.. ? Oh I went for some more stents, that was right, then I had another course, same course again to be honest, six week course which was brilliant. And that was the end of it then. I don't think anybody's ever mentioned it since.

RB: So when you came in to have your cardioversions and your ablation nobody talked to you about your weight?

HWM07: No. No, I don't like to.. Everybody's. They're all you know we got to weigh you and take your height and that but.. nobody's gone away and said.. Oh actually my doctor did say when he booked me in for my ablation, don't know whether it was a specialist not a doctor, and they did say you could do with losing possibly a stone, but I think it.. I had about six weeks and I was like, that ain't gonna happen is it? I tried for a day or two.

RB: Did they give you any explanation of why it would be good to lose a stone?

HWM07: Um I can't recall, I thought it was pretty obvious though, something around the risks would be less great. Yeah the risks of the ablation would be.. um it would be more riskier if you were going in the weight you are I think.

RB: Ok, I've got you.

HWM07: I can't remember whether he said that or whether I just assumed that to be honest

RB: Sure, so there was nothing that stuck out any way, it was just a sort of general, general advice of trying to lose a stone.

HWM07: Yeah nobody said oi fatty

RB: Well I'm glad to hear that! So, we've already talked about when you've been to see GPs and they've just sort of dropped in there oh you could do with losing weight you could do with losing weight. It sounds like because it's out of context of why that would help you or how to do that, that's a bit frustrating. Is that a fair thing to say?

HWM07: Um, no it just got the norm. I mean blimey. Don't get the.. I didn't see a doctor that often to be fair, most of my life I've been fit and healthy. I remember going through depression and even then, "Oh you could do with losing a bit of weight". And I just smiled and thought god you must.. In my opinion it was what the doctor was trained to tell you every time you visited. Um my wife's a practice nurse as well and she says it's not. I said yes it is! When they go to training school and they say: One of the last things you must say before they walk out the door was "Oh you could do with losing a bit of weight". I was convinced of that. And that's how it felt to me, I just thought, yeah yeah, whatever.

RB: Yeah, ok. So now you've had your ablation you're obviously back in AF, and you're struggling to exercise – obviously it's Christmas but after Christmas you'll be able to um concentrate on your diet a little bit more. Is losing weight something that's on your mind at present?

HWM07: Um not right for the next two weeks. It is on my mind, it has been for some time. Um, my health, my heart is on my mind and I'm sure if I lost a bit of weight I'm certain my plantar fasciitis, whatever you call it, would be easier. There's lots of advantages and having lost lots of weight, got nice and slim, um I know how good I felt. So it's constantly on my mind, yes. It would be fair to say. Even now, to be honest. You know I juggle.. I'll have a healthy tea tonight, I still eat healthily, but when I'm having a cup of coffee it's oh it's Christmas, give us a mince pie. In town on Saturday it was oh sod the coffee, I want a drinking chocolate! But at the same time I'll wake up in the morning and say no, no, just scrambled eggs on toast or something. And, it's.. doesn't make any rhyme or reason at the moment. But that is simply because it's Christmas

RB: So you feel like indulging a bit at the moment, because of the season

HWM07: Well I used to all the time, even when I was at a good weight and I was very good and.. I've got a motorhome and I travel quite a bit, every time I get the chance we're off in the motorhome somewhere. And I always claimed that that was my time. I'd sit and have a cheese sandwi.. not a cheese sandwich but a cheese board and a glass of wine when I'm away in the motorhome. Um, I remember one of the cardio nurses telling me when I was doing the nutrition course that it's 80% is a golden rule – if you can obey the rules for 80% of the time you'll get where you wanna be. And I obeyed the rules 100% of the time and when I went away in the motorhome I allowed myself a few luxuries. Um. And that's how I've al.. last ten years I've lived.

RB: Did that feel good? Because a lot of people talk about feeling deprived, but if you were able to follow the rules most of the time and then give yourself a treat when you were away, did that kind of make up for that?

HWM07: Um yes and no. I'm quite easily.. I can deprive myself quite easily. I don't miss anything to be honest. Um. It was never a big deal to me. I'd been a heavy drinker for years and being of Irish descent I love my Guinness and brandy and rum and I gave that up just the click of a finger – well enough's enough. And then I'll sit down at Sunday dinner, say once a month my son-in-law might bring a Guinness in and say here you are, do you want that and I'll say yeah, sit there and enjoy it, and it doesn't make me feel guilty, doesn't make me feel oh I want this again tomorrow. Um, it doesn't bother me to be honest, most stuff I can take it and leave it. Um, but yeah it's just my own little treat. I do without cheese, I don't drink a lot now and when I'm away in the motorhome I'll have a glass of wine and whatever.

RB: Sure, sure. So thinking ahead to January when you're planning to get your weight under control a little bit more..

HWM07: Yeah I've got a cardioversion on the [precise date]

RB: Ok

HWM07: So what I'm planning is hopefully if all goes well I'll get the cardioversion, give it a week or so to get over that, and um, then I'm on it.

RB: And what are you going to do?

HWM07: It's not just words, I know most people can say yeah I'm on a diet I'm on a diet but I know in my mind I'm on it. Um what am I gonna do? I'm going to watch my diet very very very strongly, er strictly, and I'm going to get out and walk as much as I can, um, during the day.

RB: Sure it's the combination of those two things? The diet and the walking?

HWM07: Yeah, well it worked before for me, so um, yeah. I'm not one of those guys that need to go in the gym. All the time I was in the gym um originally I used to do weights, and my doctor tells me not to do that any more. Apparently, that's not good for your heart. So I don't. So the only enjoyment I ever got out of a gym was doing weights. So I'm not one now that needs to go to a gym and run for hours on end, it bores the ass of me, I'd just rather have a walk along the canal.

RB: Sure. What were you doing in the cardiac rehab gym?

HWM07: Oh all the boring stuff that I just said!

RB: That you don't like!

HWM07: Yeah you'd go round.. I can't remember what it was now.. three minutes rowing, three minutes what was it? Three minutes running, three minutes on a walker, three minutes on a crosstrainer, three minutes on a bicycle, um stretches in between them.. um and then when I left that course I carried on at work in the gym and I increased that to five minutes on everything, and I think I built up to doing it all twice. Which they told me not to, to be honest, but I was on a roll, it didn't seem to be doing me any harm. Which I quite enjoyed that see, it wasn't too bad, five minutes on a machine, do some small weights, five minutes on some other machine, do some small weights. It was a variety so I'd be quite happy doing that again to be honest. But cor some of these ex-military guys that would go in, get on a running machine and be in the for an hour and a half – I just don't get it.

RB: But you would do, if that was offered, not necessarily for your heart attacks and so on but if it was offered as a sort of general weight loss thing for your whole health is that something you.. sounds like something you would go along to.

HWM07: Oh gosh yes! I do go, my daughters take me out now, I do a spa day with them and we go swimming and we have spa days quite regularly and I look at all the places I go to, all the spas I enquire how much is it to join, 'cause I'd quite happily go out three days a week, go and use the gym for half an hour, have a swim, I like swimmingly – go swimming for an hour, and I'd quite happily do that, but it's not easy on a fire service pension. So as soon as they tell me how much it's like, ok, I'll walk along the canal then!

RB: Yeah. It's worth keep asking when your daughters are there though, because you never know what you might get for Christmas.

HWM07: Oh I know what I'll get yeah. Most years it's a show, or a theatre, or a concert.

RB: Oh you don't think they'll club together and say oh dad we got you a spa pension.. a spa subscription for the year.

HWM07: No I've tried that a few years I've hinted that one but it ain't gonna come, it's expensive isn't it.

RB: Yeah it's expensive unfortunately.

HWM07: I just had a weekend last weekend at Cheltenham Spa, which was bought for me for Fathers' Day

RB: Oh very nice!

HWM07: Yeah, course everything's been shut down hasn't it [because of COVID 19] so it keeps getting cancelled, but..

RB: Yeah, we've had a couple of days out cancelled as well, it's disappointing isn't it?

HWM07: Well, yes and no. The whole world's suffering so I'm not complaining

RB: Oh yeah, that's entirely true

HWM07: It is what it is.

RB: Yeah, just thinking about your saying from January you're going to do this, if it wasn't Christmas now if we were say in March for example, and you were in AF as you are, and you had a cardioversion booked in a few weeks' time, would you try and lose weight in the meantime just by controlling your diet or do you always want to be able to do the exercise at the same time?

HWM07: Um.. I don't know, I was just always led to believe it was exercise and diet. My wife always laughs at me when I says about diet because she says you can't cut out much more. I mean yeah at the moment all sorts of Christmas crap but normally I'm pretty darn good, diet-wise. And we've racked our brains to try and find out what we can change, there's very little left to change or cut out. The only thing we can get down to is portion sizes maybe. And we've tried that and it doesn't work because that just leaves me hungry all day. Um. I just , I just like the idea of, I just like.. the only thing that seems to have ever worked for me is just watching your diet and doing a little bit of exercise.

RB: Sure. So it's really a combination.

HWM07: Yeah. But no to be fair, if the doctor said look, your risks are 20% as you are or 15% if you can get off half a stone just by your diet and I got a bit of advice on how to diet a little bit more, then I would certainly listen and give it a go.

RB: Sure so if it meant you were gonna have a lower risk procedure or the procedure might have more chance of being successful then that would motivate you?

HWM07: Oh yeah, I think it would have to be, you'd be silly not to wouldn't you?

RB: But there's a… it's easy to be motivated, but actually doing it is difficult isn't it?

HWM07: Yes. Yeah. Can be.

RB: Do you think it would be enough just to be told you'll be at lower risk, do you think that would help you lose weight, or do you think at the end of the day it probably would be difficult to change?

HWM07: Um… I think if you're made to realise how serious it is, then it would be enough to change me. As has in the past, with my previous problems.

RB: Yeah, ok, interesting.

HWM07: Yeah there's a little bit of.. what's the word I'm looking for? No, the word's gone. Nah, you just get a bit, hmm, yeah well that ain't gonna work, that ain't gonna make much difference. I've had three cardioversions, they haven't made a difference, I had an ablation, that didn't work, um.. yah, there's a little bit of what's it creeping in there

RB: What's that, is it frustration? Or disappointment, or…?

HWM07: I can't think of the word I'm trying to think of. And I can't think of any other way of putting it. I'll come back to that.

RB: It sounds like you're starting to feel a bit resigned to having AF

HWM07: I don't.. No. No. It's doing my head in to a point. I hate it. I wouldn't if it wasn't… Frustration is a massive thing because I'm in my 50s and like I said I'm an ex fire fighter and all that stuff and I'm used to being healthy and active, I'm not someone for sitting around and watching TV all day. And what frustrates me is that I'm like this is my 50s, late-50s, and if I was in my late-70s I would be ok with it, say well that's life, sit and watch TV all day or whatever you've got to do. But yeah it's really frustrating.

RB: Yeah. So you really feel like you can't do the things you want to do because of it.

HWM07: Yes. Yeah, very much so.

RB: Yeah, ok. Um, what's your opinion of gastric banding?

HWM07: Er, I know very little about it and don't really have an opinion.

RB: Is it something that if a doctor said to you, you need to lose some weight have you thought about a gastric band, you would think about or is it something..

HWM07: I would cer.. I would want to find out more about it, yes. Yeah. I mean, does it work? That's the first thing I want to know. I know a lot of large people have it – long term, does it work?

RB: Just to be clear I'm not advocating gastric banding for or against it's just to get your opinion of it

HWM07: No I know that

RB: But the thing with gastric banding is it does work because it makes you stomach much smaller but it very much changes how you can eat, because you can only eat very very tiny amounts each time. So if you're eating, you know if you enjoy sitting down with your wife and eating a proper meal, if that's an important part of your daily routine, then that changes. Is it a sacrifice that you would think about, or is it something that you would say no actually I draw the line there.?

HWM07: No, I wouldn't draw a line on nothing. I've said from the day I had my big heart attack I say to every doctor every nurse, do what you gotta do, it's none of my business, you know your job, I

know mine. As long as you keep me alive, you know every day to me is a bonus. I make it clear to friends and family, if I went tomorrow I'm happy that I've had a few years extra. I've got a good outlook on life. So no, I would say you need to do whatever you suggest um, I'm all ears.

RB: Sure. So you'd pretty much go along with whatever the prevailing medical opinion was.

HWM07: Yeah. 100%.

RB: Ok. So the reason I'm doing this study is quite a lot of studies since 2012 have been coming out that have shown that if people are overweight and have AF.. First off, if you're overweight, you're more likely to develop AF

HWM07: Ok

RB: If you're overweight and you've got AF and you manage to lose weight, about a third of people manage to reduce the amount of AF they have without having any other treatment at all, so without a cardioversion or without an ablation, they manage to have less AF.

HWM07: Ok

RB: Has anybody ever told you that before.

HWM07: No. No. The last conversation I had similar was with my consultant recently.. Cause first of all I asked am I in AFib and does that mean my ablation hasn't worked, I assume. And the chap said, no, it doesn't mean it hasn't worked, you can go into AFib after ablation and you can come out of it, or it can lessen, he said, it's too early to tell 'cause he needs three or four months after my ablation to find out what the results really are. That planted a little ray of hope in my head I suppose. Um. Confused me a bit as to why you would have a cardioversion as well, but um.. So that's the only conversation I've really had. I don't think that's been explained to me at all, and certainly not in any of the booklets that I've been give.

RB: Sure. So it's not something that's been very widely brought into practice but more and more cardiologists are talking about it and it's.. and certainly… being overweight damages your health in other ways as well, it doesn't just cause AF as I'm sure you realise. But the altogetherness of it. Knowing that you might have a chance of improving your AF without any other procedures, just by losing weight, would that motivate you to lose weight?

HWM07: Yeah, it would be, it would be, yeah, another motivation for me.

RB: So if a consultant, if you went to the cardiologist and they said if you manage to lose weight you have a 30% chance of reducing the amount of AF you have, would you want them to offer you any extra help at that stage or would you want to be left to your own devices to sort yourself out?

HWM07: Um, either way. If that was um explained to me in that fashion then I would come away with that's another tool in my toolbox. That's another reason for losing weight, and another.. a little bit of spurring me on. Um and at the same time if they said you know we can suggest that you do this that and the other, or here's some course that you can go on then I would definitely look at that as well. And probably take it up which I have done in the past.

RB: When you were doing rehab before how easy was it to get to, was it convenient?

HWM07: What do you mean rehab?

RB: Cardiac rehab.

HWM07: Oh yes sorry! That's what it was called wasn't it, I forgot all about that.

RB: Not the Amy Winehouse kind of rehab, not that kind!

HWM07: No, no I know. Um, not the Amy Winehouse one. Yeah no problem at all, I just drove there.

RB: And the first time you did it you were still working, were you able to fit it around work alright?

HWM07: Um, was I still working? Probably off on the sick I should imagine. Even if I was working it wouldn't have been a problem, fire service were brilliant, they were really supportive, no problem at all.

RB: Brilliant. I think that's pretty much al the questions I had for you. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about, that you've thought about, any message for us or anything since we last spoke.?

HWM07: Um I don't think so, I think you've raised some good points during the interview, I think you know yourself one or two areas that could be improved

RB: Ah-ha I think I'm getting a good idea, yeah!

HWM07: Whether you can do anything about it is another thing

RB: Well exactly because we can sort of write these studies and so on but how much you can change things is always limited. But at the end of the day it's like that story of the crow putting the stones in the water to have a drink - every stone you put in the water raises the water level up to eventually you can, you can changes things. You can get a drink.

HWM07: Yeah, that's a good one

RB: So I'll keep putting my little stones in the water jug.

HWM07: You do that.

RB: Thanks so much for your time today, I've really enjoyed talking to you

HWM07: My pleasure, I hope it helps out, both you and the medical system.

RB: Thanks very much. What will happen now as I said is I'll type this interview up and come back to you in.. it might just be after Christmas now actually but at some point, I'll come back to you and say look this is what I've written down from the interview and just get your feedback on whether I've got it right or not really

HWM07: Hope I haven't painted to bad a picture of me!

RB: No not at all! Not at all, you sound like a great bloke.

HWM07: You're gonna make me feel guilty now the rest of Christmas I'm gonna be sat here going no no I can't have a mince pie..

RB: No no have a mince pie just don't have five

HWM07: Four! I only had four!

RB: Be good 80% of the time like that other nurse said, and in January get your head together and start losing some weight.

HWM07: Yeah I will

RB: Can I just ask you one other thing – you mentioned that you're Irish, is your ethnicity white Irish?

HWM07: Yes um no, I'm British born, white British.

RB: No that's alright it's just it's good to record ethnicity because heart things vary between different ethnicities

HWM07: Oh right ok

RB: Not dramatically, but there are some patterns that you need to be aware of

HWM07: Yeah my Irish side of the family, Northern Irish, um, they've got a history of heart problems so might be something in that to be fair. Me father's British, English, um never had any heart problems. Interesting isn't it? Probably coincidence.

RB: I just think, it's all a rich tapestry you know, it's who your relatives are, you your family is, where you live, what you do with you life, you know there's all different aspects to it aren't there?

HWM07: Yeah I was absolutely amazed those rehabs I went on, I had to be the oldest person there and by far the biggest person there

RB: Really?

HWM07: And I was blown away on both rehabs and I spoke to the nurses about it and I thought, I was expecting, without pigeon-holing people, I was expecting to join a class of old, fat people, and um I was told straight away no! And there was one chap there, he was younger than me, he was a grave digger by trade, he was an ex-para, been in the paras for 20 odd years and in the army before that for 20 odd years and he was built like Arnold Schwarzenegger I guess and he put his hand up and said Can I ask why I am now a veg.. a vegetarian, I don't do dairy products, I do this, I do that, I'm a grave digger blah blah – why have I had 9 heart attacks in 3 years?

RB: Blimey!

HWM07: You know we all just sat there looking, thinking yeah.. you tend to think it's what you eat and how big you are and the nurse said there's no rhyme or reason for it

RB: Yeah, there's things we can control and things we can't control aren't there. But I work in the Heart Centre and I work in the Cardiac Angiography Suite so when people come in having heart attacks I'm one of the nurses that's there, and quite a lot of people say the same thing you know

they say what is.. I've never smoked, I eat a very healthy diet why has this happened? And I think, I mean I don't know why it's happened to anybody but there is a strong genetic component and I always say well it probably would have happened anyway, but if you'd smoked and you know eaten a load of rubbish it probably would have happened ten years earlier. So, you do yourself good don't you? It's not that it hasn't been worth it because you've got an extra ten years.

HWM07: I totally agree, I've lived a life of very heavy drinking and eating absolute crap and stress was a massive, major part of my life, um, because I ran a lot of businesses as well. And I know for a fact in my life, take all that lot out of my life it probably wouldn't have happened for another ten or twenty years. And that's why I don't mind watching my diet now and keeping that exercise now because, it is relevant and every chance you can get to keep it at bay then you gotta.. all the best with it innit?

RB: Yeah. You sound positive with it though – you don't sound like you regret that. You sound like it is what it is and you move on.

HWM07: Um, regret what? Which bit?

RB: Regret sort of eating unhealthily and drinking heavily.

HWM07: Oh gosh yeah, of course I regret it, but I can't change it. I mean I've said many a time cor I wish I had my days over, I wouldn't drink nowhere near as much as I drank and my wife just laughs and says no it was character-building and all this rubbish. But you can't change it, you are who you are. Um, but what you can do is change it from now on isn't it?

RB: Yeah. Absolutely.

HWM07: I mean I went through a, quite a long spell of depression over other issues, and um it was quite a dark old place. And when I had my big heart attack a few years ago, that really mentally put me in a different place. And I can honestly say, every single day I wake up now is an extra day, and I'm grateful for it, so there's nothing to be negative about really – not from my point of view anyway.

RB: No it sounds like you've got your head well screwed on.

HWM07: Yeah. I've got to sort the rest of me out. Right. If we're done, you have a lovely Christmas

RB: Yeah, I might speak to you before..

HWM07: And don't be eating them mince pies, practice what you preach…

RB: Just one! Just one!

HWM07: And not too much prosecco…

RB: Again, just one. Glass, not bottle. Right thanks so much, nice talking to you

HWM07: Thanks, bye.

[Ends]