Countess of Chester Hospital, Chester (Mr R Makower); Colchester General Hospital (Dr Melinda Hamilton); Derbyshire Royal Infirmary (Dr A R Clayton, Keith Waters); Dewsbury and District Hospital (Mr S M Barnes); Edinburgh Royal Infirmary (Dr George Masterton); Epsom General Hospital (Mr Jonathan Clarke); Frimley Park Hospital (Dr Malcolm Hawthorne); Stobhill, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Glasgow (Dr Flora Sinclair); Royal Lancaster Infirmary (Sister Sally Young); St James's Hospital, Leeds (Dr Sean Lynch); Leeds General Infirmary (Dr Allan House); Leicester General and Leicester Royal Infirmary (Dr Trevor Friedman); Chelsea and Westminster Hospital (Dr José Catalan, Dr Edwina Williams); King's College Hospital, London (Professor Simon Wessely, Gill Turnbull); Queen Mary's Hospital, London (Dr D Wakely); St Thomas's Hospital, London (Professor Amanda Ramirez, Dr A Hodgkiss, Mark Roberts); Withington Hospital, Wythenshaw Hospital, Manchester (Professor Louis Appleby, Inmaculada Ruiz); North Tyneside Hospital (Senior nurse Julie Mackenzie); Northampton General Hospital (Mr R S Moore); Norfolk and Norwich Hospital (Mr Keith Walters); Queen's Medical Centre, University Hospital, Nottingham (Mr Demas Esberger); Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, Omagh (Dr Tom Foster); John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford (Linda Whitehead, Elizabeth Bale, Alison Bond); Peterborough District Hospital (Mr A R Cope, Ms S Wynschenk, Mrs M Brock); Derriford Hospital, Plymouth (Mr I P Stewart); Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth (Dr T Walmsley, Staff nurse Mandy Browning); Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading (Mr S M Soysa); Rotherham District General Hospital (Mr F L P Heyes); Scunthorpe and Goole Trust Hospital (Sheila Alcester); Royal South Hampshire Hospital, Southampton (Dr Robert Peveler, Claire Kenwood); North Tees General Hospital, Stockton on Tees (Simon Richardson); City General Hospital, Stoke on Trent (Dr M S Jorsch); Kingsmill Hospital, Sutton in Ashfield (Dr Philip Meats); Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon (Dr N R Best, Jenny Rendell); Royal Cornwall Hospital, Treliske (Paul Griffith); Pinderfields General, Wakefield (Mr J Convery); Southend Hospital, Westcliff on Sea (Ms Janet Porter); Arrow Park Hospital, Wirral (Dr M A H Al-Bachari); New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton (Louise Morris).

Contributors: All authors participated in the design of the study, regular meetings to discuss the results and their interpretation, and the preparation of the report. KH and SS designed the questionnaires. KH, SS, and JJD took main responsibility for analysing the results, interpreting the findings, and preparing the report. SS and AK coordinated the data collection. DGA provided statistical advice. CB initiated the study. KH is guarantor for the study.

Funding: This study was funded by the Nuffield Trust. KH and SS were also supported by Anglia and Oxford NHS Executive Research and Development Committee.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Platt S. The media response. In: Jenkins R, Griffiths S, Wylie I, Hawton K, Morgan G, Tylee A, eds. *The prevention of suicide*. London: HMSO, 1994:125-34.
- 2 Gunnell D. Reporting suicide. The effect of media coverage on patterns of self harm. *BMJ* 1994;308:1446-7.

- 3 Phillips DP. The influence of suggestion on suicide: substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. *Am Sociol Rev* 1974;39:340-54.
- 4 Bollen KA, Phillips DP. Imitative suicides: a national study of the effects of television news stories. *Am Sociol Rev* 1982;47:802-9.
- 5 Phillips DP, Carstensen LL. Clustering of teenage suicides after television news stories about suicide. *N Engl J Med* 1986;315:685-9.
- 6 Wasserman IM. Imitation and suicide: a re-examination of the Werther effect. *Am Sociol Rev* 1984;49:427-36.
- 7 Kessler RC, Downey G, Stipp H, Milausky JR. Network television news stories about suicide and short-term changes in total US suicides. *J Nerv Ment Dis* 1989;177:551-5.
- 8 Häfner H, Schmidtke A. Do televised fictional suicide models produce suicides? In: Pfeffer CR, ed. *Suicide among youth: perspectives on risk and prevention*. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1989:117-41.
- 9 Schmidtke A, Häfner H. The Werther effect after television films: new evidence for an old hypothesis. *Psychol Med* 1988;18:665-76.
- 10 Gould MS, Shaffer D. The impact of suicide in television movies. Evidence of imitation. *N Engl J Med* 1986;315:690-4.
- 11 Ostroff RB, Behrends RW, Lee K, Oliphant J. Adolescent suicides modeled after television movie [letter]. *Am J Psychiatry* 1985;142:989.
- 12 Berman A. Suicide in television films and imitation effects. *Am J Psychiatry* 1988;145:982-6.
- 13 Simkin S, Hawton K, Whitehead L, Fagg J, Eagle M. Media influence on parasuicide. A study of the effects of a television drama portrayal of paracetamol self-poisoning. *Br J Psychiatry* 1995;167:754-9.
- 14 Platt S. The aftermath of Angie's overdose: is soap (opera) damaging to your health? *BMJ* 1987;294:954-7.
- 15 CMA Medical Data. *The directory of emergency and special care units—1996*. Cambridge: CMA Medical Data, 1996.
- 16 Bero L, Grilli R, Grimshaw J, Oxman A, eds. The Cochrane Effective Practice and Organisation of Care Group (EPOC) module of the Cochrane database of systematic reviews. In: Cochrane Collaboration. *Cochrane Library*. Issue 3. Oxford: Update Software, 1998.
- 17 Government Statistical Service. *Regional trends 33 1998 edition*. London: Stationery Office, 1998.
- 18 Diggle RJ, Liang KY, Zeger SL. *Analysis of longitudinal data*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- 19 StataCorp. *Stata statistical software: release 5.0*. College Station, TX: Stata Corporation, 1997.
- 20 Dean AG, Dean JA, Coulombier D, Brendel KA, Smith DC, Burton AH, et al. *EpiInfo Version 6: a word processing database and statistics program for epidemiology on microcomputers*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994.
- 21 Gunnell D, Hawton K, Murray V, Garnier R, Bismuth C, Fagg J, et al. Use of paracetamol for suicide and non-fatal poisoning in the UK and France: are restrictions on availability justified? *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1997;51:175-9.
- 22 O'Connor S, Deeks JJ, Hawton K, Simkin S, Keen A, Altman DG, et al. Effects of a drug overdose in a television drama on knowledge of specific dangers of self poisoning: population based surveys. *BMJ* 1999;318:978-9.
- 23 Hawton K, Fagg J, Simkin S, Bale E, Bond A. Trends in deliberate self-harm in Oxford, 1985-1995. Implications for clinical services and the prevention of suicide. *Br J Psychiatry* 1997;171:556-60.
- 24 Hughes T, Hampshaw S, Renvoize E, Storer D. General hospital services for those who carry out deliberate self-harm. *Psychiatr Bull* 1998;22:98-101.
- 25 Kapur N, House A, Creed F, Feldman E, Friedman T, Guthrie E. Management of deliberate self poisoning in adults in four teaching hospitals: descriptive study. *BMJ* 1998;316:831-2.

(Accepted 18 March 1999)

A memorable patient All in the family

In the early 1950s I was a registrar at the special unit for juvenile rheumatism, a part of the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital, Taplow, Buckinghamshire. This general hospital also housed adult cardiac patients. In those more leisurely days a morning coffee break was customary to discuss patients, research, and other projects. On one such break I presented my chief, Paul Wood, who was then the eminent British cardiologist, with an electrocardiogram for his opinion. After a quick glance he said "a classical inferior infarct, what's the problem?" I replied that the problem was that the patient happened to be a 10 year old girl with rheumatic fever. Wood blanched, threw his coffee at me, and changed the subject.

Some years later I was telephoned at the Institute of Cardiology by my opposite number at the Hammersmith Hospital to ask if I

remembered this girl. He told me that her brother had just been diagnosed as suffering from the newly described asymmetrical hypertrophy of the heart and he was investigating the family for any familial trend and found my former patient. This condition had recently been recognised from necropsy studies by Donald Teare.¹ Clinical recognition was in its early stages and my girl's electrocardiogram changes were typical of the pathology, now better known as hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy or HOCM, which has a strong familial prevalence.

E M M Besterman, *consultant cardiologist, Jamaica*

- 1 Teare RD. Asymmetrical hypertrophy of the heart in young adults. *Br Heart J* 1958;20:1.