MINERVA

After a cremation in Japan, it's usual for a bereaved family to move to the "pick up bone room" and use chopsticks to pick out the bones from the movable hearth or cremation tray and put them into an urn. In western Japan they pick up only the bones they regard as important, while in eastern Japan they pick up all of them (*Pharos International* 2006(Winter):3-12 www.cremation.org.uk).

The protein that facilitates the transfer of "good" HDL to "bad" LDL cholesterol in blood is a curved tunnel, say scientists. Cholesteryl ester transfer protein has been shown to transfer HDL cholesterol to LDL cholesterol. The boomerang shape of the protein allows HDL to bind onto its concave surface. Researchers successfully altered lipid transfer by blocking the tunnel's mechanism, so drugs that interfere with this activity could theoretically be used to treat patients who have high LDL concentrations (*Nature* 21 January 2007 doi: 10.1038/nsmb1197).

Adults from a coastal fishing village in Tamil Nadu, India, which was severely affected by the December 2004 tsunami, were interviewed two months after the catastrophe. The prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder was 12.7%, and the risk was higher in women, in people with no household income, and in those injured during the tsunami. These findings highlight the critical importance of social interventions that focused on income-generating activities and early return to work (*American Journal of Public Health* 2007;97:99-101 doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2005.071167).

Our minds automatically wander when we're not sufficiently mentally challenged, according to psychologists. When the brain is not engaged in demanding thinking but is performing monotonous tasks, some cortical regions remain active. This "background" activity produces the images and feelings that constitute "stimulus-independent thought" (daydreaming). More challenging and novel tasks attenuate neuronal activity in the "default" cortical regions, indicating greater focus. Findings of functional brain imaging correlate with subjects' own reports of daydreaming while performing boring tasks (*Science* 2007;315:393-5 www.sciencemag.org).

The Nigerian Institute of Medical Research is the oldest health research facility in Nigeria, and it has just launched the "maiden" edition of its

On the right is the x ray picture of the left shin of an 83 year old man who presented with a red, hot, swollen, tender left shin. The appearances were consistent with cellulitis, but he responded only slightly to antibiotics. X ray examination, raised alkaline phosphatase concentration, and the clinical picture confirmed the diagnosis of Paget's disease (osteitis deformans). His pain improved after treatment with bisphosphonates was started. Common in older people, Paget's disease can lead to painful, deformed, and fragile bones (the x ray picture shows anterior cortical fractures). Hyperaemia causes the reddening of the overlying skin.

Andrew Sherley-Dale general practitioner, Sunningdale, Berkshire SL5 0QJ dr.goo@btinternet.com

Rod Hughes consultant rheumatologist, St Peter's Hospital, Chertsey

own journal—the *Nigerian Journal of Clinical and Biomedical Research* (2006;1). It will be published twice a year, and authors are invited to submit suitable material now, for the June 2007 issue. For more information email njcbr@nimr.nig.org.

Encouraging patients with functional dyspepsia to focus specifically on learning flexible coping strategies may help reduce their dyspeptic symptoms, more than offering them empathy and support, say researchers who conducted a randomised controlled trial in Hong Kong (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2007;69:81-8 doi: 10.1097/01.psy.0000249734.99065.6f). Participants who received flexible coping psychotherapy rather than conventional counselling reported reduced dyspepsia symptoms comparable to the level in a healthy community sample, and also a reduction in anxiety symptoms.

An urban planning professor reckons there's a connection between the shape of a city and the shape of our bodies (*Science Online* 2007;171 www.sciencenews.org/articles/20070120/bob9.asp). Human-made landscapes described as "urban sprawl," characterised by a low density of buildings, dependence on vehicles, and a

separation of residential and commercial areas, are thought to discourage physical activity, leading to greater obesity and higher blood pressures. But others claim this is a phenomenon of "sorting" and personal preference rather than causation.

From 1950 to the 1970s Japan "enjoyed" the highest age adjusted mortality from stroke in the world. It started to fall dramatically after 1970, when blood pressure management improved—and the average height of Japanese people increased. Formal analysis found that height was significantly inversely correlated with age and with crude stroke mortality in Japanese women, but the relation is less clear in Japanese men (*Stroke* 2007;38:22-6 doi: 10.1161/01.STR.0000251806.01676.60).

A little-known risk for haemorrhagic strokes in particular seems to be the phenylpropanolamine (PPA) contained in over the counter cold remedies in some countries. A Korean study reports that in Korean people, exposure to this agent significantly increased the risk of a cerebral bleed, especially in women. The trends were dose related and also related to recent use and duration of use (*Neurology* 2007;68:146-9 doi: 10.1212/01.wnl.0000250351.38999.f2).