whom they have a complaint.

The report recommends that the Department of Health takes the lead in creating a better core standard for handling complaints that are met by all NHS and social care providers. The new system should adopt a culture of openness and leadership by senior managers and of following up complaints to ensure that mistakes do not recur, says the report.

"The fifth report of the Shipman inquiry gives us an opportunity to reflect on why the NHS complaints system is still failing patients. We must not lose this opportunity to make change happen at last," said Ms Abraham.

Zosia Kmiotowicz *London*

The report, *Making Things Better?*, is available at www.ombudsman.org.uk

Australia backs tougher regulation for complementary health products

The Australian government has backed increased regulation of the complementary health sector after the recommendations of a review, which was initiated after a crisis in the industry. Pan Pharmaceuticals had its licence suspended for six months, and more than 1600 of its products were recalled (*BMJ* 2003; 326:i1001).

The parliamentary secretary for health, Christopher Pyne, said that Australia was "very fortunate to have such a high quality complementary medicines industry" while endorsing stricter regulations outlined in a report by the Expert Committee on Complementary Medicines in the Health System, published last year.

The government has agreed to review the quality of the ingredients used in complementary health products by the \$A800m (£330m; \$630m; €470m) a year industry and develop enforceable standards governing the evidence of the claimed benefits.

Manufacturers will have to submit evidence of claimed health benefits to the Therapeutic Goods Administration, the

government regulator. The government will also modify information systems to enable easier reporting and tracking of adverse reactions to complementary health products.

Bob Burton *Canberra*

The report of the Expert Committee on Complementary Medicines in the Health System is available at www.tga.gov.au

Surgeon is accused of carrying out unnecessary surgery

A private hospital in Milan, Italy, has been forced to hand over to police the medical records of at least 21 patients who have recently had heart valve surgery.

The preliminary investigation is into the work of cardiac surgeon, Dr Roberto Gallotti, at the Istituto Clinico Humanitas in Rozzano. According to the allegations, he replaced heart valves in patients who did not need such surgery, in order to get a higher reimbursement for the hospital from the regional health service. He is now being investigated for causing serious bodily harm.

The prosecutors in Milan, who are the same ones investigating the health minister, Girolamo Sirchia (*BMJ* 2005; 330:380, 19 Feb), acted after a complaint from a 70 year old senior church member from Vigevano, a small town 35 km from Milan.

After his operation, the cleric says he was told by another specialist his preoperative examinations (including echocardiography) should have convinced the surgeon that a valve replacement was not necessary.

Dr Gallotti, who has worked at the National Heart Hospital in London as senior registrar in cardiac surgery, made no comment in the Italian press and declined to do so for the *BMJ*.

A spokesman for the Humanitas institute released a statement saying: "We confirm our total trust in Dr Gallotti's activity. We respect the prosecutors; we want to cooperate with them; and we are confident of a positive conclusion."

Fabio Turone *Milan*

Deaths in Darfur are grossly underestimated

Peter Moszynski *London*

The death toll in Darfur is far higher than previously estimated, Jan Egeland, United Nations' undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, announced last week. After a tour of the region, he explained that the much quoted figure of 70 000 deaths was released when the estimated number of internally displaced people was one million. That estimate had since doubled, and as the number of displaced people increased so did deaths from malnutrition and other causes.

"Is it three times that, is it five times that? I don't know, but it's several times the [estimated] number of 70 000 that have died altogether," he said. "The biggest [killers have been] diarrhoea, pneumonia, and many other preventable diseases."

Eric Reeves, author of a bimonthly mortality survey in Darfur, told the *BMJ*, "Egeland's estimate confirms what has been clear from extant data for months. Moreover, his figure does not include any systematic assessment of data on violent mortality, which suggests that the total figure for conflict related deaths may be higher yet."

"As Egeland himself has indicated, the real killing season has not begun: the looming famine will be the great engine of human destruction, and the impending 'hunger gap' may see hundreds of thousands perish."

After a closed meeting of the security council last week, the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, announced, "I am worried that we are not moving fast enough to deal with the appalling situation in Darfur. We keep getting reports which show that the killing and raping and burning are still going on."

A report from Médecins Sans Frontières, released for International Women's Day on 8 March, says that between October 2004 and mid-February 2005, the agency's doctors treated almost 500 victims of sexual violence in Darfur.

Sudan's minister for humanitarian affairs, Mohamed Yousif Abdalla, accused three non-governmental organisations, Oxfam, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Médecins Sans Frontières, of spreading negative propaganda because they all highlighted the problem of rape at the same time: "It is not normal that, coincidentally, three organisations come together and say one word. This is a kind of political orchestrated kind of a movement."

A spokesman for Médecins Sans Frontières denied any wrongdoing, telling the *BMJ*, "The current situation is so egregious we had to go public." □

The Crushing Burden of Rape: Sexual Violence in Darfur is available at www.msf.org

Many of the women refugees at this assembly point in Chad said they had been raped by the Janjaweed militia in Darfur, but the Sudan government has accused charities highlighting the problem of running an orchestrated political campaign