analysis. Both wrote the paper. Caroline Ramazanova assisted at an early stage of the study, Kate Nash provided invaluable advice and support, and Floss Chittenden provided unfailing support with the transcriptions of the interviews. HL is guarantor.

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Ethical approval: The full relevant requirements for the ethical conduct of research, as set out by the British Sociological Association (www.britsoc.co.uk/Library/Ethicsguidelines2002.doc), were strictly adhered to.

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Corrections and clarifications

The authors of this paper, Felix S Ram and colleagues, point out that they should have said that a longer version of their review (7 August, pp 315-8) is available in the Cochrane Library (Ram FSF, Wedzicha JA, Wright J, Greenstone M. Hospital at home for patients with acute exacerbations of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: systematic review of evidence. The authors of this paper, Felix S Ram and colleagues, point out that they should have said that a longer version of their review (7 August, pp 315-8) is available in the Cochrane Library (Ram FSF, Wedzicha JA, Wright J, Greenstone M. Hospital at home for patients with acute exacerbations of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2004;3(CD003575).)

Testing hypotheses

Medicine is the natural home of the untested hypothesis, says Hugh Pennington while pondering why doctors are so unscientific. 1 When the pain started to go down my left arm, one day some four years ago, I considered my family history of heart disease and came to the obvious conclusion. So the next day I cycled from University College London to the Royal Free Hospital, up Hampstead Hill, to my relief without a twinge. With the angina hypothesis disproved, I could safely ignore the pain, and I dug out some analgesia in case I needed it. That night I could not sleep for the pain in my arm. Paracetamol did not touch the pain, and, as it spread across the chest and I began to feel nauseated, I finally realised that the disc was innocent. The emergency services moved quickly, and the hospital departments dealt with the incident with great skill. Undergoing an emergency coronary artery bypass graft is an education, particularly if you have no major risk factors for heart disease (the “family history” now being attributed to smoking rather than genetics).

Back on my bike again and even eyeing a tree root in need of trimming, I was soon back on my bike, although I gave tree roots a wide berth, with just the occasional dart of pain and, more often, odd tingles in the hand or forearm. Thus, when the arm throbbed at the start of a tennis match just before Easter I put it down to the neck problem and carried on. The feeling disappeared, only to recur the next day as I was cycling up a relatively gentle incline, but it stopped when I reached level ground and did not recur when I cycled home. The dodgy disc hypothesis held, and I dug out some analgesia in case I needed it.