Case 3

Alarm features

DD, aged 32, presented with pain on swallowing which had been deteriorating over six months. He had no vomiting or suggestion of bleeding and his weight was steady. His pain was beginning to affect his eating habits and he had begun to choose softer food. Endoscopy revealed a long segment of Barrett's oesophagus with ulceration. Biopsies confirmed invasive adenocarcinoma. It became apparent he had suffered reflux dyspepsia for many years which he controlled with antacids. The cancer was inoperable and he died within eight months.

Patients often tolerate swallowing problems for a long time before consulting and clinicians should enquire carefully when patients present with pain or heartburn.