Case 4

Functional dyspepsia

BJ attended her GP with 'terrible indigestion' that had troubled her for two weeks. She was middle aged and her history included chronic abdominal pain. Over the years she had been sigmoidoscoped and a barium enema had showed no abnormality. There were no alarm features, gastroscopy was normal and she was negative for H. pylori. Despite this she was given a one month course of a PPI. There was no improvement in her symptoms.

She underwent another gastroscopy, colonoscopy, abdominal ultrasound, laparoscopy and various therapeutic trials. She obtained some relief but it never lasted long. A year on her records stated 'still has dyspepsia – probably functional'.

This patient had had functional dyspepsia all the time and her history of abdominal pain pointed to irritable bowel syndrome as well. All the investigations and medications may have reinforced her belief that she had a serious illness. It is important to explore psychosocial as well as clinical factors and although endoscopy may be needed to exclude organic causes, repeated investigations do not help.