Prevalence of faecal incontinence

SIR—Our paper on the prevalence of faecal incontinence [1] was published after Edwards and Jones’ similar study was accepted for publication in Age and Ageing [2]. Readers might therefore be interested in our findings which were not discussed in Edwards and Jones’ paper. The Tipping the Balance study included over 1600 interviews with people over 70 [3]. They were asked specific questions about urinary and faecal incontinence and also completed the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale and the SF-36. The prevalence of faecal incontinence was 2.4% and 3.8% in women and men aged 70–79 years whilst the corresponding figures for those in their 80s were 3.8% and 5.0% respectively. Frequent faecal incontinence was reported as occurring in 21% of those who lived in care homes. Self-reported health was decreased for all domains of the SF-36 with the greatest reductions being for role limitation physical and psychological function. Anxiety and depression scores were also highly significantly worsened in older people with faecal incontinence ($P < 0.001$). Direct comparisons between the two studies are not possible because of differences in methodologies and the way in which the results are presented. However, overall the results of our two studies are similar and confirm that faecal incontinence is a serious problem in older people that is associated with worse self-reported health and with anxiety and depression. We concur with Edwards and Jones’ conclusions that faecal incontinence should be afforded higher priority.

PETER CROME
School of Medicine, University of Keele,
Thornburrow Drive, Stoke-on-Trent,
Staffordshire ST5 3NZ, UK
Fax: (+44) 1782 747319
Email: p.crome@keele.ac.uk


Prevalence of faecal incontinence

SIR—Our paper on the prevalence of faecal incontinence [1] was published after Edwards and Jones’ similar study was accepted for publication in Age and Ageing.