

CANCER IN THE NEWS JUNE 2008

Prevention: Genes screened for cancer-free baby

A woman has conceived Britain's first baby guaranteed to be free from hereditary breast cancer.

Doctors screened out from the woman's embryos an inherited gene that would have given the baby a greater than 50 per cent chance of developing the cancer.

The woman had her embryos screened because her husband had tested positive for the gene and his sister, mother, grandmother and cousin have all had the cancer.

By screening out embryos carrying the gene BRCA-1, the London couple will eliminate the hereditary disease from their lineage.

Doctors say thousands of cases of breast cancer could be avoided by screening embryos using the technique, called pre-implantation diagnosis.

Australian 30/6/08, p13; West Australian p5.

Research: Mouth swab test claims to predict breast cancer

A mouth swab that predicts the likelihood of getting breast cancer could be used on women as young as 18.

The test, being developed by international scientists, identifies up to nine genes known to be linked to breast cancer, including BRCA1 and BRCA2.

Researchers said women found to be 'high risk' could be regularly screened, while those at 'low risk' could delay mammograms until older.

Professor Graham Giles, from the Cancer Council of Victoria, said the tests would not be conclusive, and could cause women to take drastic action and did not take into account lifestyle factors.

Sunday Herald Sun 29/6/08, p10; Sunday Tasmanian, p3.

Research: Australia, US to lend a hand to Vietnamese medical research

A collaboration between US, Australian and Vietnamese researchers is targeting diseases affecting the Vietnamese population including hepatitis B and C, dengue fever, and cervical cancer.

The collaboration includes the University of Queensland, RMIT University and The Atlantic Philanthropies, the charitable foundation of Charles Feeney.

Former Australian of the Year Ian Frazer plans to continue his cervical cancer research with Atlantic.

Australian Financial Review 30/6/08, p38.

Risk: Diabetes and heart disease risk ignored

West Australians are ignoring their waistlines and badly underestimating the link between obesity and spiraling rates of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, health experts have warned. They said a pool of 800 West Australians by Colmar Brunton for health insurer HBF and *The West Australian* showed a glaring shortfall in many people's perception of their own risk of developing some of the nation's biggest chronic diseases.

Diabetes WA chief executive Liz Benson said the survey showed that warnings about type 2 diabetes were getting through to some people but there was still a long way to go.

West Australian, 30/6/08, p7.

Tobacco: Teen mums have high smoking rate

Almost half of all pregnant teenagers in Queensland continue to smoke during pregnancy, new statistics reveal. And across all age groups in the state, more than 20 per cent of pregnant women continue to smoke throughout pregnancy – higher than the national average.

The statistics were revealed by the Queensland Perinatal Data Collection Unit, and have Australia's leading tobacco control expert, Professor Simon Chapman, calling for financial incentives to help mothers quit.

He ruled out refusing the baby bonus, but suggested that smokers could be offered a financial reward system to give up, including a weekly carbon monoxide breath test to prove they had kicked the habit.

Sunday Mail Brisbane 29/6/08, p31.

Tobacco: Permit plan for smokers

The Federal Government will consider introducing a “smoker’s permit” to force Australians to quit the habit.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon has warned smokers she is prepared to take radical action to force them to butt out, including a permit which smokers would have to buy annual and display every time they purchased cigarettes.

The option has already been mooted by a British Government adviser.

Sunday Mail Brisbane 29/6/08, p12; Sunday Herald Sun, p12; Sunday Territorian, p7; Sunday Mail Adelaide, p11; Sunday Tasmanian, p7; Sunday Times, p9.

Tobacco: Venue smoke bans lead more to quit

A year of smoking bans in bars and clubs has seen droves of smokers turning their backs on the deadly habit.

Research shows that four out of 10 recent quitters did so because they could no longer light up in licensed venues.

A Cancer Council Victoria audit of the bans show they are having the greatest impact on young smokers, with 45 per cent of 18 to 29 year-olds cutting back on smoking since July last year.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said patronage at Victoria’s bars had grown 9 per cent since the bans came in last July.

Herald Sun 30/6/08, p3.

Treatment: Radiation wait suppressed says Queensland ex-staffer

A complaint lodged with the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Queensland Ombudsman alleges that details of a blowout several years ago in waiting times for radiation therapy were concealed by the office of a former state minister.

Former Cancer Council Queensland advocacy manager Paul Turner last week filed an application in the Supreme Court seeking a ‘judicial review’ of a CMC decision not to investigate his initial allegation in 2004.

He alleges a top-ranking Queensland Health official initially approved a Freedom of Information request by the CCQ for the release of the department’s weekly wait-list reports, which showed cancer patients were waiting five times the recommended maximum time limit for treatment.

But the FOI approval was withdrawn following an ‘apparent intervention’ by a staffer within the office of then health minister Wendy Edmond, Mr Turner alleges in his application.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 29/6/08, p29.

Treatment: Two Scanners for Tasmania

The Federal Government will keep its promise to pay for a PET scanner at the Royal Hobart Hospital despite a private operator installing one next door, says Denison MHR Duncan Kerr.

The Tasmanian State Government had still not decided whether it would proceed with the long-sought \$2million PET scanner after MIA Tasmania announced plans to install one in the Hobart Private Hospital by August.

PET scanners are mainly used for early detection of cancer and more than 500 Tasmanians a year travel interstate to access them.

Hobart Mercury 30/6/08, p7.

Research: vitamin D may improve colon cancer survival rate

Patients with higher vitamin D levels before a diagnosis of colorectal cancer may have improved survival rates, US research shows.

Previous studies found that higher levels were associated with a 50% reduced risk of developing the cancer, but this study was the first to examine the survival influence following diagnosis.

Researchers prospectively examined pre-diagnosis levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D3 and mortality in 304 people with colorectal cancer from the Nurses’ Health Study and the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study.

Higher vitamin D levels were associated with a significant reduction in overall mortality. Those in the highest quartile of vitamin D levels had a 48% reduction compared to the lowest

quartile, with a trend towards improved colorectal cancer mortality. The most beneficial effect of higher levels on survival was seen in those with a higher BMI.

An associated editorial said, while important, the findings should be replicated in randomised trials before patients with colorectal cancer were advised to take vitamin D.

Dr Niall Tebbutt, a medical oncologist at Austin Health in Melbourne, said the findings added to existing data indicating vitamin D might be useful in prevention and treatment.

Medical Observer, 27/6/08, p9

Screening: caution on breast cancer predictor

Women as young as 18 could have a simple mouth swab to determine how likely they are to develop breast cancer but doctors warn the results could cause serious psychological stress and would not identify all women at risk.

The test, being developed at the University of Cambridge, would tell if a woman was carrying any of seven newly found genes linked to breast cancer. It would also test for the two high-risk genes, BRCA1 and BRCA2, discovered a decade ago.

The researchers said women deemed high-risk could be advised to have regular mammograms or choose to have their breasts removed. Those not carrying any of the genes could wait until the age of 60 before having screening. Their findings were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* yesterday.

The executive director of the NSW Breast Cancer Institute, John Boyages, said yesterday that, while advances in diagnosis were welcome, the mouth swab should be treated with caution. "They have now found seven genes linked to breast cancer but there could be 27 that we don't know about yet, so it gives women false reassurance," Professor Boyages said. The director of the Cancer Epidemiology Centre at the Cancer Council Victoria, Professor Graham Giles, said the research was reputable but the test was not foolproof and it could scare people unnecessarily. "There are women who will be deemed high-risk and will never develop breast cancer and there will be women deemed low-risk who will get breast cancer because genes are not the only determinants of cancer," he said.

Sydney Morning Herald, 27/6/08, p5; West Australian, 27/6/08, p1

Treatment: first cancer vaccine

Cuba has approved what is believed to be the first registered lung cancer vaccine.

The therapeutic vaccine extends life by four to five months longer, with few side effects. The idea is to maintain the effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Sydney Morning Herald, 27/6/08, p11

Clinical trials: Peplin salve a step closer

Pharmaceutical company Peplin has launched the next phase in its clinical trials of a weed-derived gel for the treatment of pre-cancerous skin lesions.

The trial will use a gel containing different amounts of a compound taken from the sap of *Euphorbia peplus*, commonly known as petty spurge or radium weed. The gel, known as PEP005, is being used to treat actinic keratosis lesions, a skin condition that can progress to skin cancer.

While the product is still several years away from reaching the market, Peplin said PEP005 would have a significant advantage over existing treatments because it treats lesions in two or three days.

"Unfortunately, the major challenge we face is patient dissatisfaction with the current topical medications which have long durations of treatment, pain, and persisting skin irritation and redness," said clinical trial investigator and Sydney dermatologist Robert Rosen. "As a result, patients are often unwilling to use their medications, particularly for lesions on the face and scalp."

The joint Australia-US trial will involve about 240 patients with the lesions, and test the safety and effectiveness of three different concentrations of the gel. At the end of the trial, the company is planning to meet the US Food and Drug Authority ahead of registering the drug for sale.

Age, 26/6/08, p2

Research: gut reaction is optimistic

A protein found only in the intestines may lead to a vaccine to treat colon cancers and other tumours, US researchers say.

Mice immunised with the protein and then infected with colon tumours had fewer tumours spread to the lung and liver than usual, the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* reported. Many cancer vaccines are in the works but researchers are struggling to find the right targets (antigens) that are found in tumours, not healthy tissue.

Researchers said the new approach may also work in cancers of the head and neck, lung, breast, vagina and bladder, which, like colon cancer, begin in the muscosa.

MX Sydney, 25/6/08, p10

Research: Biotech labs get research funding boost (QLD)

Head and neck cancers, influenza and Alzheimer's were among ailments targeted in \$8.6 million of state government grants unveiled last week. Premier Anna Bligh announced the grants at the world's premier biotechnology conference, Bio 2008, in San Diego last week. The Head and Neck Cancer Centre of Excellence for Asia Pacific, based at the Princess Alexandra Hospital at Woolloongabba, could receive \$1.25 million, Ms Bligh's office said. The money will go towards an \$11 million project focusing on diagnosing and treating two head and neck cancers which are prevalent in Vietnam and China but also pose problems here. Queensland University of Technology is slated to receive \$2 million for research into prostate cancer.

Courier Mail, 26/6/08, p78

Tobacco control: under cover smokes

Cigarette packs should be hidden from view in shops, according to anti-smoking lobby group Quit. Research has revealed only 10% of smokers decide the type of cigarettes to buy based on displays.

The research, released by the Cancer Council Victoria, follows moves by the British Government last month to ban cigarette displays and vending machines.

Fiona Sharkie, executive director of Quit, said virtually all smokers knew what brand they were going to buy before they walked into a shop. "There is absolutely no credibility in tobacco industry arguments that stores must display these deadly products in order to help smokers make up their mind on what brand to purchase," Ms Sharkie said.

Herald Sun, 26/6/08, p11

Treatment: prostate cancer and radiotherapy

After surgery for prostate cancer, a rising PSA (prostate specific antigen) usually means not all the cancer has been removed. One of the next options is for men to have salvage radiotherapy, which delivers radiation to the prostate bed. As this has side effects, the balance between benefit and harm has to be considered.

A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* compared men who did receive salvage radiation with those who did not. It found radiation increased survival by more than 75% in men whose PSA had doubled in the first six months and who had the radiation within two years of surgery. This happened regardless of whether they had hormone therapy too. For those whose PSA took much longer to double, there appeared to be no significant association between survival improvement and salvage radiotherapy.

The authors suggest such men may have less aggressive disease which is less likely to result in metastatic disease or death.

Australian Financial Review, 26/6/08, p58

Detection: scanner boosts cancer care (Tasmania)

A \$2 million scanner, that could have saved late premier Jim Bacon several interstate trips, is to be installed at the Hobart Private hospital by August. The Positron Emission Tomography scanner is mainly used for the detection of cancer.

Mr Bacon, who died of cancer, was forced to make arduous trips to Melbourne to access a PET/CT scanner. "I am thrilled this this PET/CT scanning service will begin in my home state," said Mr Bacon's wife. "Unlike my late husband, Tasmanians fighting cancer will no longer have to make the trip to Melbourne."

Hobart Mercury, 25/6/08, p9

Public health: some of the healthiest people on Earth

The latest report on Australia's health illustrates how well we are overcoming what were once intractable and often lethal diseases and how many of the diseases on the rise are largely self-afflicted.

The rates of heart attacks and strokes continue to fall. We are more likely to survive cancer, and the incidence of asthma has declined. The bad news is that with 7.4 million Australians overweight, the prevalence of lifestyle-related conditions such as diabetes and end-stage kidney disease continues to climb rapidly.

The health snapshot shows advances in reducing the death rate from typical killers including heart disease, strokes, cancer and injuries, contributed to an overall national life expectancy of 81.4 years, second only to Japan.

However, it comes at a cost, with health spending 45% more in real terms than a decade ago, according to the 600-page *Australia's Health 2008* produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The institute says Australia is one of the healthiest nations, taking great strides in many health areas, but there are groups whose health lags behind, particularly Indigenous Australians. But there remains great scope for health improvements through tackling "lifestyle" health risk factors, the institute says.

The federal Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon, said the report showed Australia was performing well but there were "worrying things" including the 9% decline in general practitioners in the eight years to 20005 and inequities in health outcomes between different socio-economic groups.

Sydney Morning Herald, 25/6/08, p5; West Australian, 25/6/08, p16; Herald Sun, 25/6/08, p3; Canberra Times, 25/6/08, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 25/6/08, p3

Tobacco control: last gasp for safer smokers

Philip Morris has ended market tests for cigarettes that have a filter to reduce the health risks of smoking - because Americans didn't want to buy them.

A spokesman for the company said the two brands of cigarette would no longer be made because smokers weren't interested in the new technology.

The cigarettes use a carbon filter that delivers nicotine but with potentially less exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.

Philip Morris stopped shipping the new cigarettes to wholesalers in April.

MX Sydney, 24/6/08, p12

Detection: women seek comfort

The Cancer Council was flooded with calls yesterday as news that Glenn McGrath's wife, Jane, had died of breast cancer.

Calls to the council's offices in Tasmania surged as women looked for reassurance that breast cancer would not claim their life or the life of a loved one.

Sadly, there was no increase in the number of calls from people wanting to donate to cancer research or the support of those already battling with the disease.

Cancer Council Tasmania chief executive officer Lawson Ride said it was traditional for the phone to run hot after a high profile Australian woman was affected by breast cancer. "Most of the calls we are taking are from healthy women worried for themselves and their daughters," Mr Ride said. "We encourage women of any age with breast cancer concerns to call the Cancer Council Helpline."

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd paid tribute to Jane McGrath, describing her as an "inspiration" to all Australians. He said that after being diagnosed with breast cancer, Ms McGrath had embarked on a course of action aimed at inspiring thousands of women who suffer from the disease. "Jane McGrath was, and will remain, a source of inspiration and hope to all Australians, in particular to those personally affected by cancer," Mr Rudd said.

Jane McGrath may be gone, but her legacy will continue through the breastcare nurses that inspired her to set up the McGrath Foundation.

Hobart Mercury, 24/6/08, p7; Daily Telegraph, 24/6/08, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 24/6/08, p10

Detection: hero dies, but legacy lives on

Heroic breast cancer activist Jane McGrath lost her decade-long battle with the disease yesterday, as friends and family paid tribute to her inspiring legacy.

Ms McGrath was first diagnosed with breast cancer 11 years ago. The British-born former

flight steward also battled secondary cancers in her hip and brain. It was with deep sadness that her family announced she had died. "Jane's wonderful life ended peacefully after a sudden decline in her health over the past week," a statement said.

Ms McGrath, 42, had her latest round of surgery this year and was recovering before complications arose. Her battle won the hearts of Australians as she vowed never to give in. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was among the first to pay tribute, saying her courageous struggle touched all Australians.

Yesterday, the statement by her family described the impact her life would continue to make on others. "Jane McGrath has left a lasting legacy through the McGrath Foundation, an organisation that is providing thousands of women hope - and support - in their fight against breast cancer."

Herald Sun, 23/6/08, p4; Age, 23/6/08, p1; Adelaide Advertiser, 23/6/08, p1; Australian, 23/6/08, p1; West Australian, 23/6/08, p3; Courier Mail, 23/6/08, p6; Canberra Times, 23/6/08, p5; Sydney Morning Herald, 23/6/08, p4; Daily Telegraph, 23/6/08, p4

Public health: state told prevention much cheaper than cure

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and state premiers will be given a dire warning next week to invest more in preventive health programs or face an unsustainable and growing strain on public hospitals.

A "work in progress" health report will be handed out at the Council of Australian Governments meeting Sydney on July 3, calling for urgent efforts to stabilise and educate people at high risk of health problems in the community before they are admitted to the overburdened public hospital system.

With the population ageing and increasingly overweight, the future burden on the already strained public health system is expected to be enormous. "Focus is galvanising around what we can do in the prevention space as a way of dealing with broader long-term productivity issues but also more pressingly from the states' perspective, taking some pressure off hospitals," a senior government source said.

It follows a report from the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, warned that the obesity epidemic could cause 123,000 premature deaths over the next two decades. Health Minister Nicola Roxon said it was clear that Australia needed to undergo a significant cultural shift to tackle obesity.

Sunday Age, 22/6/08, p2; Herald Sun, 21/6/08, p13

Research: the big C

For years, cancer doctors have known that many patients aren't helped by the drugs they're given. The trouble is, until now, there hasn't been any reliable way of working out who will do best on which treatments.

But that is about to change. An important study has found that people with a certain type of gene won't benefit from selected cancer drugs.

This is hugely significant because it means gene tests can be used to work out which patients will do best on a drug, and as a result cancer treatments will become much more effective.

And because doctors will be able to better target expensive treatments, drugs currently not recommended by NICE because they are not cost-effective could soon be re-evaluated.

"It's not so much a new dawn, more that someone has opened the blinds and let the sun in."

That's how Dr David Sidransky, a leading cancer specialist, has described the significance of the research, which was presented at a major cancer conference in America earlier this month.

The gene involved is called K-ras - it affects the rate that tumours divide and spread.

Sunday Territorian, 22/6/08, p43

Risk: cancer check on fire fighters

The incidence of cancer in Australian firefighters will be studied as a result of a Queensland investigation into cancers at a fire station.

Queensland Health investigated five reported cases over the past 15 years at Atherton fire station, but found "no issues of concern". However, Emergency Services Minister Neil Roberts sought for a national study into the incidence of cancer, and fire services across Australia are supporting it.

The national study of firefighters will monitor rates of death and cases of cancer compared with the general community. It will also monitor health outcomes, such as general well-being and deaths from non-cancer causes. It will examine whether there are types of firefighting of particular exposures which are associated with increased cancer incidents or deaths. Queensland Fire and Rescue Service hopes to be the lead agency in the investigation.
Sunday Mail Brisbane, 22/6/08, p3

Tobacco control: 'smoking gun' of tobacco debate

They are the silent victims of passive smoking, unable to make their voices heard in a thick cloud of toxic fumes. Despite the primary motivation for a review of tobacco rules, children have not participated in the debate on smoking - until now.

The Cancer Council NSW has organised a bundle of heart-wrenching letters penned by kids to the NSW Government supporting tougher smoking laws.

They are among more than 5600 public submissions to be considered by the government in response to its discussion paper, *Protecting Children From Tobacco*, which examines new reforms to reduce tobacco-related harm.

The children's letters, with original grammar and spelling intact, describe their own experiences of second-hand smoke and include heartfelt pleas to policy-makers.

Giving children a voice in the government's smoking debate was the brainchild of western Sydney mother-of-three Melanie O'Connor. She believes the issue of passive smoking has been dominated by adults for too long and wanted to stand up for those who are usually too young to have a say. She said children were frustrated because they knew about the harmful effects of smoking, but were powerless to stop family and friends lighting up around them.

Sunday Telegraph, 22/6/08, p20

Treatment: 'salvage' radiotherapy aids prostate cancer

Giving "salvage" radiotherapy to men who have had radical surgery for prostate cancer but are facing the disease returning can reduce the risk of dying almost 60%, American doctors have found.

Writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers from the John Hopkins University school of medicine in Baltimore said "mop-up" radiation could triple the survival rate of men who had their prostate removed but continued to have high readings from prostate-specific antigen tests.

While radical prostatectomy gave men a good chance of survival, up to 40% faced their cancer returning within five years and doctors said until now it was not known if having radiation after the cancer came back, known as salvage radiotherapy, improved their prospects.

The American study of 653 men found that early radiation reduced the risk of death by almost 60%, and when combined with hormonal therapy, the risk of death dropped 75%.

The improved survival rates were limited to men whose PSA levels doubled in less than six months and where the radiotherapy was given within two years of the cancer returning.

"Our data provide the first evidence that early salvage radiotherapy is associated with improved survival," the study said.

West Australian, 21/6/08, p72

Obesity: four million Aussies in danger from 'fat bomb'

Australia's "fat bomb" has been greatly underestimated, with a staggering four million adults now believed to be obese, a million more than previously thought, new research shows.

A report from the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute has also found that more than two-thirds of middle-aged men and women, or nine million Australians, are carrying too much weight and could trigger a major blowout in rates of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

The fresh figures come only weeks after controversial claims by a Sydney child health researcher that the childhood obesity epidemic had been exaggerated and any increases were happening only in low-income families.

The latest report, entitled *Australia's Future Fat Bomb* argues that while childhood obesity is a major concern for disease risk, people aged 45-64 should be a key target for weight loss efforts because they have the highest rates of obesity compared with other age groups and are most at risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes over the next 20 years.

Professor Simon Stewart, head of preventive cardiology at the institute and author of the report, said the statistics were sobering and underlined the need for urgent action, including better food labelling. "The 'fat bomb' is ticking loudly in middle-aged Australians, with around seven out of 10 men and six out of 10 women aged 45 to 64 being overweight or obese," he said.

The report calls for a national weight loss strategy on the scale of smoking and skin cancer campaigns, including subsidising gym memberships and personal training sessions for heavier people.

Curtin University professor of health policy Mike Daube said the figures were "intensely worrying" and Australia was heading down a path that was making it one of the fattest nations in the world. If present trends continued the current generation of children would be the first to face a reduced life expectancy.

Herald Sun, 20/6/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 20/6/08, p25; Hobart Mercury, 20/6/08, p7; Age, 20/6/08, p1; Canberra Times, 20/6/08, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 20/6/08, p13

Prevention: British girls to get cervical cancer jab (International)

A vaccine against cervical cancer based on work by former Australian of the Year Professor Ian Frazer will be provided to British schoolgirls after the Government awarded a supply contract to drug giant GlaxoSmithKline.

Under the three-year contract, GSK will supply hundreds of thousands of doses of its vaccine Cervarix, which will be given to British schoolgirls aged 12 to 13 to immunise them against two strains of HPV.

It will also be made available to girls aged 14 to 18 in a catch-up program that will be implemented in the next two to three years.

Australian, 20/6/08, p7

Research: how shark-infested waters may heal us

They are the predators of the ocean, but their blood may hold a key to saving human lives.

Victorian scientists have discovered a way to collect disease-fighting proteins from shark blood that they believe could help in the fight against cancer, malaria and arthritis.

Researchers took genes from shark blood and modified them to create random mutations.

These mutations mimic how the human immune system works, producing antibodies that can be used in studying disease.

Hundreds of thousands of shark antibodies have been created and stored, providing scientists with a library of proteins they can use to test whether certain antibodies attack specific diseases. Because shark antibodies are much smaller than those of humans - about one tenth the size - they are more stable, which raises the prospect that future treatments may be taken orally instead of by injection.

Work at La Trobe has discovered a shark antibody that binds to a molecule implicated in breast cancer. Researchers are now investigating whether it has the ability to slow the growth of cancer.

Age, 20/6/08, p6

Treatment: patient's own cells 'cured' skin cancer

A man battling advanced skin cancer has made a full recovery in a stunning medical breakthrough in which he was injected with billions of his own cloned immune cells, doctors say.

In what experts hailed as a potentially major breakthrough in the treatment of cancer, the 52-year-old was free from tumours, which had spread to his lymph nodes and to one of his lungs, less than eight weeks after being treated. Two years later the man was still free of cancer.

American scientists in Seattle started the treatment by removing a particular form of the man's infection-fighting white blood cells known as T cells. They then cloned the cells and injected five billion back into his body. The man received no other treatment. The cells persisted in his body for at least 8 days and the tumours regressed.

The results were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Lead researcher Cassian Yee cautioned that the outcome was only seen in one patient. If the therapy was effective in more people, Dr Yee predicted it could be used in 25% of all late-stage melanoma

patients who had the same immune-system and tumour antigen. He was surprised by the anti-tumour effect of the T cells and the duration of the response. "For this patient we were successful but we would need to confirm the effectiveness of therapy in a larger study," Dr Yee said.

West Australian, 20/6/08, p1; Sydney Morning Herald, 20/6/08, p5; Hobart Mercury, 20/6/08, p19; Adelaide Advertiser, 20/6/08, p38; MX Brisbane, 19/6/08, p1

Research: experts cautious about US cancer breakthrough

In a world-first, US researchers have used a cancer patient's own cloned blood cells to cure him of the disease, without the need for any other therapy.

The team from Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre removed infection-fighting white blood cells from a 52-year-old man with advanced melanoma that had spread to a lymph node and lung. The "CD4+" cells were cloned in a laboratory, then 5 billion of them were pumped back into the patient's blood system to boost his immune system. Two months later the tumours had gone completely and he has remained in remission for the past two years.

The researchers say this is the first time this technique has been used successfully as the sole therapy to put an advanced tumour into long-term remission.

Team leader Cassian Yee warned that the results represented only one patient with a specific type of immune system, and the therapy needed to be confirmed in a bigger study before he could be sure it was effective.

Local cancer experts praised the research - reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* - but warned it was far too early to claim that a cure for cancer had been found.

Age, 19/6/08, p4

Research: \$100m supercomputer will boost life science research

A \$100 million supercomputer capable of processing 400 trillion pieces of information a second to help scientists accelerate their research into diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer's will be built in Melbourne.

The powerful machine will be able to generate, manage and manipulate enormous amounts of information - such as extensive patient records or genetic databases - and make it easier to map the spread and treatment of viruses.

When it is completed in 2011, Victoria will be home to the largest supercomputer in the world dedicated to the study of life sciences.

Announcing the project yesterday, Premier John Brumby described it as the "missing link" in the state's investment in this field, which has included the \$207 million Australian Synchrotron in Clayton.

Professor David Bowtell, research director of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, said the supercomputer could help scientists mine data for significant events in cancer. "There are lots of possibilities of what could be mutated and we can look right through them very quickly with this computer."

Age, 19/6/08, p4

Screening: longer wait for breast screens (ACT)

A lack of specialists has been blamed for a blow-out in waiting times for Canberra women who need routine mammograms.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher issued yesterday a report on the health system, saying it showed significant improvements in the emergency department and elective surgery. But the report also revealed a shortage of radiologists had caused delays for Canberra women who are routinely screened for breast cancer.

About 2500 women - in this "major target group" - had mammograms through the Capital Region Cancer Service in the third quarter of this financial year. More than 2800 women had used the breast screening service.

One in every two women waited more than 28 days for an appointment and 50% of women had not received their assessment within 28 days. Only one in four women had waited too long for their assessment during the same quarter in 2006-07.

"The wait time for assessment reflects the 22% increased demand and the recent changes to the number of women allocated to assessment clinics and reduction in available radiologists,"

the report stated. "However, action is underway to recruit more staff. This should result in improving services for the near future."

Canberra Times, 19/6/08, p3

Research: lifestyle switches disease genes 'on, off'

Comprehensive lifestyle changes, including a better diet and more exercise, could lead not only to a better physique, but also to swift and dramatic changes at the genetic level, US researchers said yesterday.

In a small study, the researchers tracked 30 men with low-risk prostate cancer who decided against conventional medical treatment such as surgery and radiation or hormone therapy. The men underwent three months of lifestyle changes, including eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and soy products, moderate exercise such as walking for half an hour a day and an hour of daily stress management methods such as meditation. As expected, they lost weight, lowered their blood pressure and saw other health improvements. But the researchers found more profound changes when they compared prostate biopsies taken before and after the lifestyle changes.

After the three months, the men had changes in activity in about 500 genes - including 48 that were turned on and 453 genes that were turned off. The activity of disease-preventing genes increased while a number of disease-promoting genes, including those involved in prostate cancer and breast cancer, shut down, according to the study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The research was led by head of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, California, and a well-known author advocating lifestyle changes to improve health Dean Ornish.

Canberra Times, 18/6/08, p3

Risk: research defuses mobile cancer risk

Germany's main radiation laboratory has concluded mobile phones are safe and pose no cancer risk to users after a study lasting almost 10 years.

The survey by the Federal Radiation Protection Bureau found no evidence whatsoever that mobile phones, cordless phones or cordless base stations situated next to beds caused brain cancer, headaches or disturbed sleep in adults.

But the scientists said they would like to study the issue longer to make sure young children exposed to such electromagnetic fields did not develop health problems in old age.

The bureau, which employs top radiation scientists, advised parents not to let children keep phones permanently in their clothing until such a risk had been ruled out.

MX Sydney, 17/6/08, p7; MX Melbourne, 17/6/08, p7; MX Brisbane, 17/6/08, p7

Skin: sun bed risk now accepted

The death of Melbourne woman Clare Oliver from melanoma, which she said was caused by UV radiation from solariums, has been a powerful education tool on the dangers of sun beds, according to new research.

The results of two phone surveys by the Cancer Council WA and Curtin University published in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia* showed awareness of the risks of solariums increased greatly after Ms Oliver's death in August 2007.

When people were asked about their perceptions of cancer risk factors in September 2006, only 40% said solarium use increased cancer risk "a lot". But when the survey was repeated in late 2007, 72% said sun beds were a substantial risk for cancer.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said the increase could be directly attributable to the significant media coverage surrounding the death of Ms Oliver. Mr Slevin said solarium use exposed people to intense levels of a known carcinogen and international research was continuing to add to evidence that use of sun beds increased the risk of skin cancer. "All of those arguments fell largely on deaf ears when it came to policy and political action until Clare Oliver," he said. "Clare in her last months of life told her story in a clear and unequivocal way and it was that story and the way people responded to it that meant the tipping point was reached and policy change was able to occur."

West Australian, 18/6/08, p51

Detection: new mini microscope

A tiny microscope that travels through the human body to detect early stage cancers will be

installed in three hospitals in Victoria.

The Melbourne developed technology has been rolled out in 30 major hospitals worldwide and now Australians will benefit from the invention, which is giving new hope for better disease survival.

The miniature microscopes offer doctors magnifications of 1000 times, compared to 30-40 times in traditional endoscopy. This will allow clinicians to detect gastrointestinal tract cancers and diseases such as ulcerative colitis and gastritis without biopsies.

The microscopes will be installed at the Western and Box Hill hospitals and Monash Medical Centre.

Daily Telegraph, 17/6/08, p9

Public health: cancer claims in court

The Brisbane-based makers of a range of fruit-punches which they claim cure cancer will front court this morning to answer charges under Queensland's stringent health laws.

The owners of Dr Red Nutraceuticals are scheduled to appear in the Brisbane Magistrate's Court on charges under Queensland's Food Act 2006. Lawyers for Queensland Health are expected to allege the company has breached the Act by publishing "health claims" in a company brochure and on Dr Red's official website.

It is understood Queensland Health does not take issue with claims made by the company, but is prosecuting on the basis the company made details of health trials public. Legal sources told *The Courier Mail* that while it is not an offence for details of human health trials to be made public, it is effectively an offence for those funding trials to publicise information. In NSW, a University of Sydney cancer research team last year claimed antioxidants in Dr Red's Blueberry punch killed the cells of five different cancers in clinical tests. Research fellow Jas Singh said prostate, breast, bladder, colon and stomach cancer cells were all dramatically reduced after two weeks of treatment.

Brisbane urologists Dr John Yaxley and Professor Robert Gardiner in November said they intended to take the tests a step further, by undertaking human trials in partnership with the University of Queensland.

The move is the fourth known attempt by Queensland Health against a company claiming its products has significant health benefits.

Courier Mail, 17/6/08, p7

Public health: teens left in danger

Parents are being blamed for 26% of young Queensland women not being given the life-saving cervical cancer vaccine Gardasil.

More than 23,000 young Queensland women aged between 14 and 17 have not received the cervical cancer vaccine under the National Immunisation Program. Queensland take-up rates for the free vaccine program are at 74% - lower than the national average estimated to be 80-90%.

Inventor of the vaccine, Professor Ian Frazer, believes a "head in the sand" approach from parents is to blame. "Everybody has the right to say no," he said. "That is their right but they also have the right to get cervical cancer and they also have the right to die, it goes with the territory."

Young Queensland women are also not following through with the three-dose program - necessary to ensure its effectiveness. Only 69% have received the second dose and 62% have received the third dose, yet-to-be published figures from Queensland Health show.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 15/6/08, p16

Research: study throws some light on mystery cancer

A study of the state's third deadliest cancer has provided hope that new ways to treat the mysterious disease can be found.

About 1500 people a year in NSW are diagnosed with the condition, which is called unknown primary site cancer because doctors cannot identify the organ where it originated before it spread around the body.

The CEO of the Cancer Institute NSW, Jim Bishop, said the research - the first of its kind - suggested the disease was a distinct type of cancer, perhaps caused by malignant stem cells, rather than known cancers that had spread to other organs. It also showed that some patients have a better chance of survival than world experts had thought.

"With this new information, doctors and researchers can now explore how this cancer could be diagnosed earlier," Professor Bishop said. "The study also raised the possibility that

differences in the genetic make-up of unknown primary site cancer could lead researchers to new discoveries to improve treatment and survival."
Sydney Morning Herald, 16/6/08, p2

Skin: solar death 'a lesson'

The death of Melbourne woman Clare Oliver from melanoma has been a powerful lesson of the dangers of sun beds, according to new research.

The results of two phone surveys by the Cancer Council and Perth's Curtin University, published in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia*, found that people's awareness of the risks of solariums had increased greatly after the death of Ms Oliver in August 2007.

When people were asked about their perception of cancer risk factors in September 2006, only 40% said their solarium use increased cancer risk considerably. But when the survey was repeated in late 2007, 72% said sun beds were a substantial risk factor for cancer.

Age, 16/6/08, p6

Support: cancer patients push to be heard

Tasmanians affected by cancer have united to demand a better deal for cancer patients. At the launch of Cancer Voices Tasmania (CVT) in Launceston yesterday, interim chair Karen Forster said the advocacy group would provide a forum for people to share their issues, experiences and ideas.

"Many issues are common to all cancer types and these are the ones CVT will be focused on," she said. "We will advocate for individuals and on broader issues."

Ms Forster said all cancer patients deserved access to a personalised multi-disciplinary cancer care program. "Everyone should be treated by a team of specialists that encompass all aspects of care. Many cancer patients get caught in a maze of taking information from one doctor to another."

Ms Forster also said the group would pursue issues such as equitable access to doctors for those living in rural areas and accommodation and transport.

Sunday Tasmanian, 15/6/08, p6

Tobacco control: cancer rate lower

Women who smoke are no more likely to develop lung cancer than their male counterparts, according to a US study.

Whether female smokers are more susceptible to the disease, responsible for more deaths in Australian than any other cancer, has long been a source of controversy among cancer experts, and until now research has produced conflicting results.

Researchers from the National Cancer Institute in the US analysed data from nearly half a million men and women on their smoking habits and rates of lung cancer. In findings published in *The Lancet Oncology*, they concluded that female smokers were slightly less likely to develop lung cancer than male smokers.

Sunday Age, 15/6/08, p11

Treatment: osteoporosis drugs can aid against cancer

All women at high risk of breast cancer should be given drugs commonly used to treat osteoporosis, a new report says. The Cancer Institute NSW says 9000 Australian women could avoid developing breast cancer in the next five years if they took the drugs tamoxifen and raloxifene.

The institute's chief executive, Jim Bishop, said international trials had shown that these so called selective oestrogen receptor modulators could reduce the risk of hormone-sensitive invasive breast cancer in about 70% of high-risk women.

"The opportunity to avoid breast cancer in around 70% of high-risk, post-menopausal women is very encouraging, so there's a strong case for the modulators to now be used in Australia," Professor Bishop said.

The NSW Assistant Health Minister (Cancer), Verity Firth, welcomed the report and said she was keen to get the idea, which would cost \$240 million a year, discussed widely. "NSW will be providing this interesting research from the Cancer Institute to the appropriate federal

health authorities," she said.

The report also found use of the drugs would be cost effective. The estimated cost of \$240 million a year - or between \$20,000 and \$40,000 for every healthy life-year saved - is a worthwhile investment, Professor Bishop said.

Sun Herald, 15/6/08, p16

Treatment: laser targets prostate cancer

Cancer patients can now receive targeted radiation therapy that will reduce the number of necessary treatments by more than a third.

The new image-guided radiation therapy was used for the first time on prostate cancer sufferers at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane last week. Doctors say the technology will reduce the number of treatments necessary to shrink tumours in men with prostate cancer from 35 to 20.

"Accuracy is everything in cancer treatment," said PA director of radiation oncology, Associate Professor Bryan Burmeister. "We used to rely on a patient's bony anatomy and X-rays to work out roughly where the tumour was before beginning radiation therapy. Now with CT scans we can see the bones, the surrounding soft tissue and the tumour. So if we are not on target we can move the patient to ensure we are hitting the right target. This technology is more accurate because we can direct the beams."

Professor Burmeister said the technology would reduce painful side-effects for cancer patients as well as reduce waiting lists by cutting treatment regimes. "Ultimately with this laser guided technology we can shorten the length of treatment necessary because with the accuracy we can push the doses higher and kill the tumour quickly," he said.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 15/6/08, p34

Public Health: Women ignore heart threat

Australian women dangerously underestimate their risks of dying from heart disease, new research released by the Heart Foundation shows.

Some 70 per cent do not realise heart disease is the biggest killer of the national's women, with most believing breast cancer is their top threat.

Almost 10,800 women died of heart disease in 2006, compared with almost 2630 who lost their lives to breast cancer.

The Newspoll survey of 1307 women launched the Go Red for Women Day education campaign. It also found gaping holes in women's knowledge about risk factors for heart disease.

Herald Sun, 13/6/08, p31; West Australian, p11; Adelaide Advertiser, p22; Daily Telegraph, p18.

Public Health: We'll go, food industry warns

The \$70 billion processed food industry is flexing its muscles to try to head off new anti-obesity measures.

It has warned the Rudd Government major food companies could go offshore if they face tougher regulations.

The government is under intense pressure to address the obesity crisis as part of its preventive health strategy, which was flagged before the election.

It is considering calls by health groups for new 'traffic light' warnings on food packaging to help consumers make healthier choices.

But in a submission to a House of Representatives obesity inquiry, the Australian Food and Grocery Council said the system was flawed, and the submission also rejected so called "fat taxes".

Herald Sun, 13/6/08, p4.

Skin: ACCC takes on solariums

The competition watchdog has targeted more than 40 Melbourne solariums in a crackdown on alleged misleading claims about the safety of indoor tanning.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission yesterday began legal proceedings against the Tropical Sun tanning studios, the Body Bronze group of salons, and the Australian Tanning Association.

The ACCC alleges the industry engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct by publishing inaccurate information on websites and media releases. Marketing material on Body Bronze's website claims that tanning is a "natural protection against UV light".

The commission has also targeted Australian Tanning Association president Scott Meneilly, who last year wrote an open letter claiming that cancer crusader Clare Oliver did not die of cancer caused by solariums.

The Cancer Council Victoria welcomed the ACCC's action.

"The evidence is overwhelming that solarium use does increase the risk of skin cancer," said Craig Sinclair, the council's director of cancer education. "The ACCC has made it clear that companies have to inform consumers of the risks. But people do forget."

Age, 13/6/08, p6; Herald Sun, p1.

Research: Cancer tool gets tick

Listed device maker ImpediMed said yesterday the success of its lymphodema diagnostic tool had been reinforced by results of a new study.

Queensland University of Technology put the device through its paces in a trial involving 300 women with the post-breast cancer condition.

A fifth of the 11,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer develop secondary lymphodema, in which fluid collects in tissue leading to distressing symptoms.

QUT professor Sandra Hayes said early diagnosis was critical for effective treatment and ImpediMed's sensitive measurement device, the L-Dex U400, would help with such detection.

This latest study consolidates the outcomes of a recent US National Institute of Health report, which has led to widespread acclaim of the technology in North America.

Herald Sun, 13/6/08, p85.

Tobacco: Tiny cost to quit

Raising the price of a packet of cigarettes and increasing exposure to anti-smoking ads could drastically slash the smoking rate, an Australian-led study as found.

The research, to be published in the American Journal of Public Health today, found price increases and media campaigns were the most effective ways to reduce the uptake of smoking and encourage people to quit.

Study co-author Professor David Hills said the results showed the government needed to consider greater investment in tobacco control to achieve gains in public health.

The study used monthly survey data from Australia's five largest capital cities to assess the impact of anti-smoking ads and other policies on adult smoking rates.

Quit executive director Fiona Sharkie said the study provided the government with a blueprint on the best ways to reduce smoking.

Herald Sun, 13/6/08, p21; Canberra Times, p2.

Treatment: ChemGenex regains leukaemia drug rights

Chemgenex has taken full commercial control of its promising leukaemia drug, streamlining the company ahead of a licensing deal or possible acquisition.

The company has bought back the European intellectual property and commercial rights for its leukaemia drug omacetaxine from Stragen Pharma.

The scrip deal will give Stragen a 17% stake in the company, pending the approval of ChemGenex shareholders in the next two months.

Age, 13/6/08, p4.

Public Health: Computer crash hits WA cancer clinics

WA cancer sufferers face radiotherapy treatment delays because of a computer meltdown at three major Perth hospitals this week which has prevented staff from accessing some patient records.

The North Metropolitan Area Health Service said yesterday that staff at Sir Charles Gairdner, Osborne Park and Graylands hospitals had had computer problems caused by a suspected software malfunction.

The hospital said some patient services were affected and new appointments could not be booked until the computer problems were resolved.

West Australian, 12/6/08, p11.

Public Health: Parents want clear contents labelling on package

The Parents Jury this week released the results of a survey of its members in which 85 per cent said they wanted a legislated requirement for a food labelling 'traffic light' system that showed high, medium and low levels of fats, sugar and sodium.

Food consultant Kim Terakes released a report *The Food Revolution*, in which he predicts a wave of litigation against the food sector in the next 10 years and a junk-food tax. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12/6/08, p33.

Research: Cancer patients want to be told about expensive drugs

Australians with terminal cancer want doctors to tell them about expensive drugs that could add a few months to their life, even if they cannot afford to take them.

A recent survey found that more than 40 per cent of cancer specialists do not tell their patients about new unsubsidised drug treatments, most of which cost at least \$5000 per month. The information is often withheld for fear of distressing sick people about options financially out of their reach.

A new Australian study, presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Chicago this month, found that more than 90 per cent of people would want to be informed, even though only 50 per cent said they would be willing or able to pay for the drugs.

Study leader, Dr Linda Mileskin, a medical oncologist at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, indicated that many of the new targeted anti-cancer therapies show promise for improving quality of life and extending survival in early trials, often years before they are made cheaply available by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Cancer Council Australia chief executive Professor Ian Olver said a doctor's decision to withhold drug information from patients was "compassionate but ill-directed".

Canberra Times, 12/6/08, p10; *Hobart Mercury*, p29

Research: Fast breast cancer detection extends life

Women whose breast cancers are detected early live as long as those who never developed the disease, an audit in Britain by the Association of Breast Surgery and the NHS Breast Screening Program has shown.

The audit traced the outcomes for women with breast cancer diagnosed in 1990-91 and 2000-01.

It found that patients who responded well to treatment for small, early stage cancers could expect a normal life span five years after diagnosis.

The study also showed survival rates are improving for women with more aggressive types of breast cancer.

Australian, 12/6/08, p8; *Adelaide Advertiser*, p30.

Research: Smoking risk confirmed

Smoking cigarettes has the same effect as cutting the life span by five years, according to a mortality risk chart released yesterday in the US Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

The figures were derived by compiling death and health risk statistics from various agencies such as the American Cancer Society and the National Centre for Health Statistics and were arranged into 10-year- risk charts.

Daily Telegraph, 12/6/08, p23; *Adelaide Advertiser*, p31; *Herald Sun*, p33.

Research: Chinese food colouring aids cancer, researchers claim

A compound in Chinese red yeast rice can reduce the risk of dying from heart disease by a third and cancer by two thirds.

Researchers said the benefits of the food colouring even seemed to outstrip those of statins, the most effective cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Scientists tracked almost 5000 heart attack survivors aged 18-70 at more than 60 hospitals in China for five years.

Patients who took capsules of the red-yeast rice preparation XZK had a 45 per cent reduced risk of repeat heart attacks, bypass surgery and angioplasty. Death dropped a third and risk of dying of cancer dropped by two thirds.

[Researcher cited by yesterday's media as Dr David Capuzzi, of Thomas Jefferson University in Pennsylvania]

Herald Sun, 12/6/08, p33.

Research: Cancer patients warned off using antioxidants

A major US review said patients should be discouraged from using antioxidants supplements during radiation or chemotherapy "because of the possibility of tumor protection and reduced survival".

Despite 20 years of research, there was no clear answer on the benefits or harm of antioxidant supplements, but "this combined treatment approach should be avoided until it is shown to be safe", they wrote in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

The US review included nine studies on the concurrent use of antioxidants with radiotherapy and 16 randomised controlled trials of concurrent use with chemotherapy.

Professor Jim Bishop, head of the Cancer Institute of NSW, agreed that people having either radiation or chemotherapy should avoid the supplements.

Australian Doctor, 6/6/08, p5.

Research: Gene change clue to bowel cancer

Scientists have identified subtle chemical changes in genes that may make the bowel more vulnerable to the development of cancer, leading to new hope of ways to reverse or delay the disease.

Researchers at the Institute of Food Research in Britain found the changes might make the whole surface of the bowel more susceptible to the eventual development of cancer by causing abnormal gene expressions.

The discovery paves the way for a new method of identifying defects that could eventually lead to cancer. The next step will be to investigate if lifestyle factors such as diet can control the chemical changes and delay or even reverse the onset of cancer.

The research was published in the British Journal of Cancer.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said there was a genetic component to bowel cancer that could make some people more susceptible to developing the disease and it was worth pursuing research to find out more about hereditary causes.

West Australian, 12/6/08, p18.

Risk: Shift work may be a risk for cancer

The head of sleep and circadian research at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney, Dr Ron Grunstein, claims that shift work seems to be a risk for different types of cancer.

"Melatonin is thought to be a substance that retards the growth of cancers," Dr Grunstein says.

Dr Grunstein says there are also negative studies, so the area is not clearly proven.

WHO concluded that night work involving circadian disruption was "probably carcinogenic" because of studies focusing on flight attendants and nurses who had a high incidence of breast cancer. That constitutes the limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans which, when coupled with sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals, suggests the link.

Dr Sally Ferguson, of the Centre for Sleep Research at the University of South Australia, conducted a background review of the literature on which the WHO assessment was based.

"There is certainly no evidence to suggest a causal link between shift work and cancer," she says. "At this point, our conclusions are that the animal and human studies taken together don't provide convincing evidence that shift work causes cancer. However, it would be prudent not to discount it."

A problem with research in this area is the many confounding factors that could account for things such as the observed high rates of cardiovascular disease among shift workers.

Sydney Morning Herald, 12/6/08, p20.

Tobacco: Smoking bans may spread

Research shows a sharp rise in people going to the pub since strict smoking bans began last year.

New data from Cancer Council Victoria shows a 9 per cent rise in hotel patronage since July last year, when smoking was banned inside all pubs and nightclubs.

Anti-tobacco groups have called for smokers to butt out in alfresco dining areas and beer

gardens that serve food. Queensland has already banned smoking in outdoor eating areas, as have several NSW councils.

More than 80% of the 1250 respondents to the survey – which included current and former smokers – said the ban had not made any difference.

Quit executive director Fiona Sharkie said the research proved smoking bans were good for business.

Age, 12/6/08, p5.

Research: Chinese food colouring leads to longer life

The ingredient used to colour Peking duck can cut the risk of dying from heart disease by a third and cancer by two-thirds, scientists say.

The researchers claimed the extract of fermented rice - used in China for thousands of years as a food preservative, colourant and seasoning - could improve heart health.

Researcher Dr David Capuzzi, of Thomas Jefferson University in Pennsylvania, said the benefits of food colouring from red yeast rice seemed to outstrip those of statins – cholesterol lowering drugs.

For the study, scientists tracked heart attack survivors at more than 60 hospitals in China.

They focused mainly on heart disease, but cancer deaths were also recorded.

Courier Mail, 11/6/08, p20; Adelaide Advertiser, p11.

Research: Middle-aged smokers have poor memory

Middle-aged people who smoke tend to perform poorly on tests of memory and reasoning compared to non-smokers, according to French researchers.

Researchers from the National Institute of Health and Medical Research in France analysed previously collected data on 5000 British civil servants. They found those who smoked were more likely than people who never smoked to be in the lowest performing of five groups in tests of memory, reasoning, vocabulary and verbal fluency. Smoking was associated with mental decline in middle age, as it is with dementia and other physical ills in life, they found.

The research was published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*. The participants were aged 35 to 55 at the beginning of the study, which followed the subjects for 17 years.

Canberra Times, 11/6/08, p7.

Research: Cancer risks higher for wealthy children

British experts said that research suggested that certain cancers that occur in the young, such as skin and brain tumours, were most closely associated with affluence – though the reasons are not yet clear.

Cancer Research UK Professor Jillian Birch indicated that cancer incidence and mortality overall increased with increasing deprivation.

“However, different cancers and age groups show different patterns,” she said. “Geographical variations in incidence, trends over time and associations with deprivation and affluence can point to lifestyle or other environmental factors as possible causes.”

Adelaide Advertiser, 11/6/08, p34

Research: Protein structure cracked

Monash University microbiologist Professor James Whisstock was last week given the Commonwealth Health Minister’s Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research.

His team uncovered the structure of perforins - a protein that plays a key role in the immune system by attacking infected cells as well as cells that turn cancerous.

This achievement won him and his team international recognition when the results were published in the journal *Science* last year. The achievement will help in developing therapies to combat infections and cancer.

Australian, 11/6/08, p22.

Risk: Cancer fundraising buns linked to disease: advocate claims

Artificial colours which have been linked to cancer, hyperactivity and asthma which are contained in Bakers Delight pink finger buns sold to raise funds for breast cancer should be immediately replaced, according to a leading consumer advocate.

Julie Eady said two of the colours used in the icing of the pink buns – 123 Amaranth and 124

Ponceau Red – were suspected carcinogens and had been banned for use in foods in the US.

Ms Eady said while there had not been any human studies linking the colours to cancer, animal studies had made the link and in the case of Ponceau Red, the colour was one of the six found to cause hyperactivity in children by British researchers last year.

The pink buns are sold in April and May with money made going to the Breast Cancer Network Australia.

A spokeswoman for Bakers Delight said the two colours were approved for use by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, and the regulator approved additives only when it could be demonstrated no harmful effects were expected to result from their use.

West Australian, 11/6/08, p17.

Public health: check-up for males

The Federal Government will develop Australia's first national men's health policy, recognising men have poorer health than women, are likely to die earlier and are at greater risk of suicide.

The policy, to be finalised next year, will address the delivery of medical services for all Australian men. It will focus on prevention, address behavioural risk factors and make health services more male-friendly. The policy will also address the sexual and reproductive health needs of men.

"Men's health is too often overlooked as an issue," Health Minister Nicola Roxon told *The Sunday Mail*. "We know that men face a specific set of challenges and we are determined to help men tackle them."

Over the next 12 months, the Government aims to consult consumers, health providers and state and territory governments to shape the policy. A forum will be held in Canberra at the end of this year. "We want to know what men consider to be the priorities for their health," a department spokesman said. "And we want to look at how we can build up the evidence base in this area, including opportunities for research over the long term."

In a separate development, the Cancer Council is calling on all 50-year-olds to take up the new screening opportunity offered by the expanded national bowel cancer screening program.

Australians aged 50, 55 and 65 can now be screened for bowel cancer free of charge as part of the Federal Government's \$87 million Budget commitment to bowel cancer screening.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 8/6/08, p48; Sunday Telegraph, 8/6/08, p2; Sunday Times, 8/6/08, p10

Public health: cancer unit coming but at \$6m more

The push for Darwin's cancer ward has been revitalised - but it will cost an extra \$6 million. Health Minister Chris Burns said he had a preferred company to operate the radiation oncology unit for the next 10 years and hoped to make an announcement in two months. But they will no longer have to build the ward.

"They are medical specialists, not engineers. It doesn't make sense to have them build and operate the unit," he said. A separate tender will be called in two weeks to find a company to design and build the unit.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon signed off on an extra \$6 million for the unit - taking the construction cost to \$19 million. But Dr Burns denied it was a cost blow out.

The first instalment of \$5.7 million has already been given to the Territory - which will go towards design and start up costs. Dr Burns suggested the previous Federal Government had under-costed construction costs for the cancer unit.

Opposition Leader Terry Mills said the blow out diminished confidence in the Government's "ability to do anything". "The delay in delivering this unit has cost taxpayers dearly and cancer sufferers more."

Northern Territory News, 9/6/08, p7

Research: 'deadly' vitamins

Cancer patients taking antioxidant supplements have been warned to stop, with new research showing they could protect tumours and lower survival rates.

Antioxidants have a reputation as "cancer fighting" and are commonly available in pill form,

making them particularly appealing to people fighting the disease. But new US research has found taking antioxidants during chemotherapy and radiation raises "serious concerns" and may interfere by protecting cancerous cells from being killed off by treatment. Australian experts have backed the research and say patients should try to get a balance of nutrients by eating foods such as fruit and vegetables rather than taking a high dose pill. Kathy Chapman, nutritionist at the Cancer Council NSW, said cancer patients were always on the lookout for products or diets that could give them "the edge" in fighting the disease. "People have the mentality - and vitamin manufacturers have it too - that if a little bit is good then a lot must be better," she said. "Unfortunately that's not the way it works in science. She said antioxidant supplements potentially protect cancer cells that already exist.
Sunday Telegraph, 8/6/08, p31

Screening: bowel cancer test kits 'save lives'

Australians are putting their lives at risk by waiting for symptoms before being tested for bowel cancer, a study has found. Research by the Bowel Cancer and Digestive Research Institute Australia has found many Australians over the age of 50 are not testing for bowel cancer because they feel well and do not have any symptoms. But gastroenterologist Cameron Bell, from Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, said bowel cancer symptoms often did not appear until cancer was advanced and difficult to treat. "Testing for bowel cancer is important as it can detect disease in its early stages - before symptoms appear - when it is still possible to make a full recovery," Dr Bell said. "Just as testing for breast, prostate, skin and ovarian cancer is now the norm, testing for bowel cancer should also be routine for all Australians over the age of 50." The research was conducted in March this year and surveyed 300 Australians over the age of 50, over the phone. Fewer than half of those surveyed said they had been tested for bowel cancer and a third had not even spoken to their GP about the condition, the results showed.
Canberra Times, 10/6/08, p3; Age, 10/6/08, p2; Sydney Morning Herald, 10/6/08, p2

Skin: slip, slop shock (WA)

Children as young as six are getting skin cancer, with figures showing the number of melanomas diagnosed in WA has jumped alarmingly in the past 10 years. There were 1052 new cases diagnosed in WA in 2006, a 63% rise from 670 people diagnosed in 1997. Figures for 2007 will be released later this year. But *The Sunday Times* can reveal there were three children aged 14 and under diagnosed with melanomas last year. MoleScan state medical director Jonathon Bell urged parents to err on the side of caution, because the company's clinics had previously diagnosed skin cancer in WA children as young as six. Dr Bell said bad genetics were the most likely cause of skin cancer in young children. Fair-skinned children with "red" hair and blue eyes were most at risk. Cancer Council WA director of research and education Terry Slevin said genetic mutations made some families more susceptible to skin cancer. He said cases of skin cancer in children under 15 were rare. Mr Slevin said scientists had not identified all the genetic markers for skin cancer. "There is a debate as to whether sun exposure plays a major role," he said. "Some might argue that if you have got that mutation, even the smallest exposure might actually trigger the melanoma. But it seems reasonable to suggest that the high UV climate in WA is likely to be a contributing factor."
Sunday Times, 8/6/08, p24

Detection: WA leads in breast cancer detection

WA is leading the country in finding early breast cancer and precancerous breast changes, helping the State to achieve one of the lowest death rates from the disease in Australia. An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report for 2004-05 shows that WA's breast screening program is picking up significantly more cases of ductal carcinoma in situ, a condition which causes changes to the cells lining the breast ducts and can turn into invasive breast cancer if not treated. It also shows that substantially more WA women aged 50-69, the target age group for mammograms, were screened compared with five years earlier. Nationally, around 1.2 million

women took advantage of free breast screening, just over half the number of women in the target group.

In the meantime death rates from breast cancer fell 23% between 1990 and 2005, with the biggest fall in women in their 50s and 60s, particularly in WA where the death rate was 49.2 per 100,000 compared with the national average of 53.1 per 100,000.

BreastScreen WA medical director Liz Wylie said the results were encouraging.

West Australian, 6/6/08, p9

Public health: GPs failing men - study

A health system, which does not cater for the needs of men is sending many to an early grave, experts warn. Australian men live an average five years less than women, however many of the biggest killers could easily be prevented if doctors asked more questions and men were better educated about health, research shows.

Preliminary results of a University of Adelaide study show the leading causes of men's premature death - heart disease, suicide, vehicle accidents and lung cancer - could be dramatically cut if the health system became gender-specific.

Professor Gary Wittert, leader of the Florey Adelaide Male Ageing Study, said Australian doctors had to be re-educated to provide men-specific health care, with the most important step to start asking reluctant men about their health.

Dr David Oberklaid, a medical adviser to Cabrini Health's Foundation 49, said men were heavier smokers and drinkers, bigger risk takers and less likely to get help at the early stages of conditions than women but he said men-friendly waiting rooms, clinic hours and sympathetic doctors prepared to take the time despite GP shortages, would help close the five-year life expectancy gap.

Herald Sun, 6/6/08, p15

Screening: Kylie's X factor in test rush

Kylie Minogue's breast cancer diagnosis resulted in a massive increase in young women being screened for the disease but failed to improve detection rates, research has found. Mammograms and breast ultrasounds in women aged 25 to 34 rose by a third in the six months after the pop diva's cancer battle became public in May 2005, University of Melbourne researchers said. Breast biopsies in that age group surged by 46%.

But the study, published this week in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* found the number of operations to remove breast cancers did not change significantly in women aged 25 to 44 who are considered at low risk of developing the disease.

"We were quite surprised by the findings," study leader Margaret Kelaher said. The researchers used Medicare data to study the impact of intense publicity associated with Minogue's illness. They suggested the surge may have reduced the system's capacity to deal with older, more high-risk women.

"These findings suggest that thousands of additional imaging procedures and biopsies did not improve breast cancer detection among young women," Dr Kelaher said. "It appears there has been a situation where publicity has led to many low-risk women using - and probably overusing - screening services."

Dr Kelaher said while Minogue had been a great ambassador for breast cancer awareness, the publicity surrounding her plight highlighted the need for more carefully aimed health campaigns. "Consultation between a celebrity PR team and public health agencies on how to shape and disseminate the information could help create a message with the best chances of furthering the quality of care and sound public health practice."

Courier Mail, 6/6/08, p25; Herald Sun, 6/6/08, p22; Canberra Times, 6/6/08, p3; Age, 6/6/08, p2; Hobart Mercury, 6/6/08, p2

Research: natural therapies not the answer to cancer

Green tea is the most common alternative medicine used by women to try to avoid cancer, a survey has found. A study of almost 900 Australian women with a family history of breast cancer found that while complementary medicine use is very high, just 6% were using it specifically to block cancer.

The Melbourne cancer specialists behind the study said the results were reassuring because there was "next to no evidence" that supplements, specialist diets or physical therapies

could do anything to ward off the disease.

"We would hope that women would be using these things for their overall health benefits, not for preventing cancer specifically because there are no definite studies to say that this works," said Dr Kathryn Field, an oncology researcher from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

The study found, of those who took the therapies to avoid cancer, green tea was most widely used, followed by vitamins, a soy rich diet, a low fat diet and omega-3, none of which have proven disease-protective powers, Dr Field said. "And not only that, but people often don't tell their doctors if they're taking these things and there's a good chance that they could interfere with other conventional therapies and drug treatments."

Northern Territory News, 5/6/08, p23

Risk: study 'of little help' to staff with cancer

A proposed environmental audit of an Adelaide hospital building may do no more than reassure the women working there, according to the expert who led a study that found staff there had twice the expected rate of breast cancer.

David Roder, head of research and information science at the Cancer Council South Australia, said many of the breast cancer cases found among staff at the Queen Victoria building of the Women's and Children's Hospital would have originated years before the building opened in 1995.

"I think that many of these breast cancers would have had their origins in the early 1990s or even the 1980s," he said. "You're dealing with a long latency disease here, so even though I think the environmental audit is important to reassure the staff, it wouldn't address what the environment was necessarily 10, 20 years ago."

An environmental audit will begin next week to determine if the building, home of the hospitals maternity and neonatal services, is a cause of the cluster.

Australian, 5/6/08, p7

Screening: sick stars put public in a panic

The hype around Kylie Minogue's breast cancer may have caused more harm than good by creating unnecessary panic among younger women, a study has revealed.

Millions of fans around the world were devastated when Kylie announced in 2005 she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Organisations used the health scare to prompt women to check their breasts and support breast cancer research.

But young women may have put themselves through unnecessary angst and trauma by undergoing mammograms and biopsies. Medicare figures reveal that in the months after Kylie's diagnosis, there was a large increase in the number of women aged 25-44 who were referred for breast screenings.

Researchers from the School of Population Health and University of Melbourne tracked women undergoing screenings and biopsies between October 2004 and June 2006. They found the total number of breast biopsies increased from about 3600 a month before Kylie's diagnosis to more than 5500 a month at the height of the publicity.

Their research, published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, also revealed the international publicity prompted a 33% increase in breast ultrasound and biopsy rates but no actual increase in detection of breast cancer.

"Highly publicised illnesses may affect both consumer and provider behaviour," the study found. "Although they present opportunities to improve public health, they also have the potential to adversely impact the appropriateness and cost effectiveness of service delivery."

Researchers believe doctors may have been pressured to refer younger patients for unnecessary checks following the widespread concern.

Daily Telegraph, 5/6/08, p14

Tobacco control: plain packaging urged

Health lobby group Quit has called on the Federal Government to force the tobacco industry to use plain packaging for cigarettes. Quit said removing logos, colours and attractive imagery from cigarette packs could help curb the toll of smoking on the community.

The British Government this week released a number of tobacco control proposals that, if accepted, would mean tobacco companies will be obliged to sell cigarette packs stripped of

logos and colours.

Quit executive director Fiona Sharkie said the British move reflected a global recognition that tobacco packs were advertising that lured potential new smokers into buying cigarettes.

Age, 5/6/08, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 5/6/08, p9; Hobart Mercury, 5/6/08, p2

Treatment: new hope on breast cancer

An experimental drug is showing early signs of promise for improving the treatment of aggressive, advanced breast cancer.

Preliminary results presented at a major cancer conference in Chicago yesterday indicate that women with HER2-positive breast cancer could benefit from adding the new drug to the blockbuster cancer medication Herceptin.

Herceptin and another medication, Tykerb, are the only targeted therapies on offer in Australia to treat this form of the disease, which affects about a quarter of breast cancer patients and responds poorly to chemotherapy.

Both are subsidised for use at different stages of the disease and results presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting show positive results from trials of the two drugs together and in combination with new-generation medications not yet on the market.

Adelaide Advertiser, 5/6/08, p13

Detection: blood test beats cancer

Hundreds of women could be saved by a world-first blood test developed in Australia to detect ovarian cancer in its early stages. The early detection test - found to be 94% accurate during clinical trials - will be available from September, allowing cancers to be diagnosed early enough for treatment.

Developed by Melbourne biotech company HealthLinx, the OvPlex early detection test screens for five biomarkers in blood, providing a 94% accurate indication a woman either has or does not have ovarian cancer.

The only existing test for ovarian cancer - called CA125 - screens for a single marker and is only accurate in 50% of early stage ovarian cancers. Because it can also provide false-positive readings and must be followed up by an invasive procedure for confirmation, the existing test is largely limited to monitoring treatment or testing for recurrences in women already battling the disease. But as the new test has not yet achieved a 99% success rate, it cannot be rolled out as a community screening program for cervical cancer in the same way as mammograms are used for breast cancer.

However, HealthLinx managing director Nick Gatsios said it was a major step forward for women in the highest risk groups who could have regular screening. "With increased diagnostic efficiency at 94% and increased awareness of the disease, the test should save hundreds of lives," he said.

Cancer Council Victoria support service director Doreen Akkerman welcomed the breakthrough saying detecting ovarian cancer early was the key to survival. "Anything that improves survival rates for women with ovarian cancer is welcome," she said. "It will be a real blessing for women with ovarian cancer because for many years only 20% of diagnosed women survive more than five years."

Daily Telegraph, 4/6/08, p18; Adelaide Advertiser, 4/6/08, p23; Herald Sun, 4/6/08, p3

Research: cancer sufferers in denial

Most people who get cancer blame stress, bad luck or even germs for their disease and disregard the real causes, such as smoking and diet, a survey has found.

Oncologists are calling for greater cancer education for Australians as a result of new findings that show cancer patients don't understand what is likely to have triggered the condition, preferring instead to attribute it to unrelated or emotional factors.

Half of more than 300 breast and bowel cancer patients questioned said stress or worry played a role in their disease, while 40% said bad luck was influential and about 30% said overwork, poor immunity or their emotional state contributed. A smaller number thought an accident, a virus or germ or even their personality was responsible for their disease, according to the study presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in Chicago yesterday.

"There is basically no clinical proof any of these things influence whether you get cancer, yet

this is what people seem to believe," said lead researchers and oncologist Dr Corona Gainsford. "And even more worrying is that the real causes of disease, like smoking, were well down the list of what people thought could be responsible."

Courier Mail, 4/6/08, p29; Daily Telegraph, 4/6/08, p18

Risk: hospital 'cancer cluster' may grow

The high number of staff diagnosed with breast cancer at Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital may climb, with calls to broaden the search for more possible victims.

The cluster of women who worked or volunteered in the hospital's Queen Victoria Building, where the maternity and neonatal services are located, had twice the rate of breast cancer statistically expected.

Following the release of preliminary findings from a government review, State Health Minister John Hill said yesterday the building did not seem to be the cause of the cancer, but an environmental audit would begin next week.

State Opposition health spokeswoman Vickie Chapman said the review, confined to between 2000 and this year, needed to go back to 1995, when the building opened.

Eighteen women working in the Queen Victoria Building between 2000 and the end of last year were diagnosed with breast cancer. The review found eight fewer cases of other types of cancer among staff in the building than would be expected.

Lead by David Roder, head of research and information science at the state's Cancer Council, the review was prompted by an anonymous staff member.

Australian, 4/6/08, p3; West Australian, 4/6/08, p53

Treatment: alternative breast cancer treatment not offered

Doctors are failing to tell women at high risk of developing breast cancer about a potentially life-saving alternative to mastectomy, a study has found.

Research shows that giving chemotherapy drugs to women who have high rates of the disease in their family can reduce the risk of developing cancer by between 30 and 50%. But fewer than 1% of those seeking advice on risk management are taking up the option.

A Victorian study presented at a cancer conference in Chicago yesterday showed doctors were not offering so-called chemoprevention as an option for several reasons, including concerns over effectiveness and cost, and the belief women did not want to take hormone treatments.

Cancer researchers from the University of Melbourne argued the option was well supported by patients but clinical practice is still yet to catch up with the evidence.

"We've had large-scale trials that confirm this as a good option for women but they're not being told about it, which is not right," said study leader Dr Louise Keogh, from the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society. "We need to see this change so at least they have the choice."

Cancer Council Australia chief executive Professor Ian Olver said chemoprevention should be widely offered to manage risk, "but I wouldn't be surprised if women elected not to take it.

Encouraging well people to take a pill every day to remain well can be very difficult,"

Professor Olver said.

Daily Telegraph, 4/6/08, p18; Canberra Times, 4/6/08, p3

Treatment: living wills laws passes through Upper House (WA)

The State Government's so-called living wills legislation, which allows West Australians to indicate which medical treatment they wish to receive, finally passed through the Upper House last night.

The Consent to Medical Treatment Bill 2006 will bring WA laws into line with the rest of the country by protecting the wishes of terminally ill patients within a legal framework.

Medical lobby groups have continued to fight for the changes, arguing that existing laws did not reflect today's approach to end-of-life decision-making. The Australian Medical Association, the Palliative Care Association, the Cancer Council WA and the Health Consumers Council all back the new laws.

Last night, Liberal MP Helen Morton made an eleventh-hour plea for the Upper House to consider what she described as a loophole which would allow health practitioners to override

a person's wishes if they believed the patient's circumstances had changed. WA's Voluntary Euthanasia Society has argued the living wills legislation would become the first step towards legalising voluntary euthanasia. WAVES president Ranjan Ray said the new laws would go some way to resolving the issues surrounding end-of-life management but claimed they did not go far enough to protect the rights of dying patients. The Consent to Medical Treatment Bill 2006 will now return to the Lower House for all new amendments to be approved.
West Australian, 4/6/08, p5

Clinical Trials: Gene find aids bowel cancer fight

Bowel cancer patients will soon be able to get a test that predicts how well they will respond to the latest drug therapies following a genetic breakthrough involving Australian oncologists. The international cancer trial has identified a type of gene that has become the first marker of bowel cancer.

The finding means patients could be tested to determine which drugs would be most effective in treating the currently incurable cancer.

About two-thirds of patients diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer have the normal form of the gene and could benefit significantly from using one of the newest anti-cancer drugs, Erbitux, with standard chemotherapy. The other third whose tumours contained the mutant form of the gene had no benefit from adding the new drug.

The trial results were presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in Chicago.

Professor Ian Olver, Cancer Council Australia chief, said the development was very promising for patients diagnosed with advanced disease, a common occurrence as the cancer has few visible symptoms.

Age, 3/6/2008, p5; West Australian, p18.

Research: Targeted drugs combination gives breast cancer hope

The two drugs used in Australia to target the most aggressive form of breast cancer could be used in combination to even better treat the disease, a new study suggests.

Research presented at a major cancer conference in Chicago has shown that the two targeted drugs, Herceptin and Tykerb, may slow the progression of advanced disease more than using one on its own.

The specialist drugs are used to treat her-2 positive breast cancer, a particularly aggressive form of the disease that affects about 30 per cent of patients and has poor survival rates.

The Texas study, sponsored by Tykerb manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline, involved 300 heavily treated women, and found the combination had double the clinical benefit of using Tykerb alone.

Professor Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia, said the development was an interesting way of incrementally increasing the results in breast cancer treatment.

Hobart Mercury, 3/6/2008, p9; Launceston Examiner, p10.

Research: Cancer can't be beaten by positive thinking, experts say

The popular belief that a positive attitude can help fight cancer has been debunked by a group of Australian specialists who have proved a fighting spirit does not increase a patient's survival chances.

The Melbourne researchers, who presented their findings at a cancer conference in Chicago, studied 708 women who had been newly diagnosed with localised breast cancer and tracked them over eight years to see if their cancer relapsed.

Professor Kelly-Anne Phillips, medical oncologist at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne said: "People often really beat themselves up and blame their attitude if their cancer relapses. We've shown they're not at fault."

The research was conducted by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in conjunction with Cancer Council Victoria.

Cancer Council Australia chief executive officer Professor Ian Olver said he had been involved in a smaller study about lung cancer that reached a similar conclusion.

"A positive attitude is great and it clearly helps quality of life when you're going through treatment, but it makes an undetectable difference to disease."

Canberra Times, 3/6/08, p2; Age, p5.

Risk: Hospital cancer fears ease

An inquiry into cancer at the Women's and Children's hospital in Adelaide has found higher than expected rates of breast cancer, but lower levels of other cancers.

The state opposition called for an inquiry into reports of high breast cancer rates among staff at the hospital last year.

Female staff who were employed at the hospital from 2000 to 2007 were included in the review which found that there was increase in breast cancer rates for women working in the Queen Victoria Building.

The Children, Youth and Women's Health Service invites past and present staff with relevant information to contact them.

Adelaide Advertiser, 3/6/2008, p2.

Support: Right-to-die law set to pass but is not enough

WA's leading right-to-die lobby group will renew its push to legalise voluntary euthanasia, saying today's expected passage of controversial living wills legislation through the Upper House does not go far enough to protect the rights of dying patients.

WA Voluntary Euthanasia Society urged the state government to introduce new changes to the way end-of-life wishes are handled by allowing doctor-assisted suicide with the use of lethal injections of prescriptions.

The Australian Medical Association, the Palliative Care Association, and the Cancer Council of WA have lobbied in support of the changes, which will enable people to give power of attorney to a nominee, who could ensure their wishes were carried out.

West Australian, 3/6/08, p5.

Tobacco: Pubs, clubs pushed for total smoke ban in NT

Smoking could be banned in pubs and clubs under new laws being considered by the Northern Territory government.

A proposal is being circulated in government for the next phase of smoking legislation that aims to confine smoking in pubs to beer gardens and terraces.

The Northern Territory was described as a 'national embarrassment' this week when the AMA gave it the Dirty Ashtray Award for the third year in a row.

Northern Territory News, 3/6/08, p3.

Clinical trial: cancer drug to be studied

A South Australian clinical trial aims to determine if testosterone can reduce the side effects of a breast cancer treatment. Ninety post-menopausal women taking anastrozole, sold as Arimidex, are needed for the trial.

Adelaide breast surgeon Dr Stephen Birrell is researching if increasing the blood level of testosterone in women taking anastrozole can reduce joint pain, bone thinning or osteoporosis and hot flushes.

Adelaide Advertiser, 2/6/08, p8

Research: early test for ovarian cancer moves closer

Melbourne researchers believe they are closer to an early screening test for ovarian cancer after discovering markers of the disease in blood.

Scientists at the Prince Henry Institute believe they have identified proteins that act as signals of the cancer, which, if confirmed, would form the basis of an early screening test.

"We know that in 95% of cases, if we can detect it early, we can cure it by conventional surgical techniques," said Dr Andrew Stephens, an Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation fellow at the Prince Henry Institute.

Using a technique called proteomics, the researchers examined thousands of proteins in patient blood samples and identified about 100 candidate proteins that may act as markers of ovarian cancer.

The researchers hope to develop a blood or urine test that would detect the disease at an early stage. Dr Stephens said a screening test for ovarian cancer would need to be highly sensitive and specific to avoid false positive diagnosis.

Dr Stephens said he hoped the team would be able to begin clinical trials of a test within the next few years. "It's still early days, but its looking very promising," he said.

Sunday Age, 1/6/08, p7; Sun Herald, 1/6/08, p6

Research: study backs vitamin D in cancer fight

Women who have low levels of vitamin D when they are diagnosed with breast cancer are almost twice as likely to see the cancer spread and 73% more likely to die within 10 years, research has found.

The findings, presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting in Chicago yesterday, represent the first time researchers have been able to link not having enough of the vitamin to the progression of breast cancer.

The research is considered significant because it raises the possibility of treating breast cancer using a cheap, easily available nutrient.

Professor Pamela Goodwin of the University of Toronto said although the new research showed that poor vitamin D levels raised the risk of death from breast cancer, scientists had not yet determined the optimum amount to be taken as a supplement.

Sun Herald, 1/6/08, p31

Risk: new fears on HRT, cancer link

The use of hormone replacement therapy is under fresh scrutiny after the release of evidence linking the menopause treatment with an increased risk of breast cancer.

A new study, published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, led by the Cancer Council NSW, found that for the first time in 20 years breast cancer rates have fallen in Australian women - a trend linked to fewer women taking HRT. It estimated that 600 fewer Australian women a year were being diagnosed with breast cancer, a 6.7% reduction.

The study looked at the impact of the controversial Women's Health Initiative Study into HRT in 2002, which warned of a significantly increased risk of breast cancer and heart disease in women using HRT. It prompted millions of women worldwide to abandon the therapy.

While studies have since found as much as a 12% drop in breast cancer rates among American women after the release of the WHI findings, until now Australian health experts have said it was too soon to say if there was a similar trend here.

But writing in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Dr Karen Canfell, from the Cancer Council NSW said the rapid fall in the use of HRT appeared to be largely responsible for the recent drop in invasive breast cancer in women aged 50 and over. In contrast, there had been no change in breast cancer rates in women younger than 50, who rarely used HRT.

Dr Canfell said the changes in breast cancer rates did not appear to be due to other factors such as the number of women being screened for breast cancer. But the study found that the risk of breast cancer started to fall once women stopped taking HRT.

CEO of the Cancer Council NSW, Dr Andrew Penman, described the study's findings as great news for women. "The correlation between the drop in breast cancer cases and HRT use is clear and its importance can't be underestimated," Dr Penman said. He said the regulatory bodies should review the use of HRT. Risks increase rapidly if HRT is taken for more than five years.

The director of the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Dr Helen Zorbas, said although the link was "likely" the study did not categorically show a drop in HRT caused the decrease in cancer rates and did not change the advice to women regarding the use of HRT for the short-term relief of menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes. "There may be other factors which could be contributing to this decrease in breast cancer incidence," she said.

Australian, 2/6/08, p3; 2/6/08, p3; West Australian, 2/6/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 2/6/08, p11; Courier Mail, 2/6/08, p18; Sydney Morning Herald, 2/6/08, p6; Canberra Times, 2/6/08, p1; Herald Sun, 2/6/08, p9; Adelaide Advertiser, 2/6/08, p9; Age, 2/6/08, p4; Hobart Mercury, 2/6/08, p9

Tobacco control: push to ban all tobacco ads

The World Health Organisation has called for a ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship to prevent young people from starting to smoke.

In a statement issued ahead of World No Tobacco Day this weekend, the UN agency said sophisticated marketing techniques were ensnaring young people in fashion magazines, in films, on the internet and at concerts and sporting events.

"The more young people are exposed to tobacco advertising, the more likely they are to start

smoking," it said, accusing cigarette makers of "falsely associating use of tobacco products with qualities such as glamour, energy and sex appeal".

Most smokers take up the habit before the age of 18, and almost a quarter of new smokers are younger than 10, according to the WHO.

Director of the WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative Douglas Bettcher said that a full ban was necessary to ensure that young people were shielded from dangerous messages, particularly in poorer countries.

Canberra Times, 31/5/08, p18; Sunday Canberra Times, 1/6/08, p6

Tobacco control: under-the-counter sales plan has retailers fuming

Retailers have joined forces with the tobacco industry to fight the next battle in the State Government's war on smoking.

The first anniversary of the ban on smoking in pubs and clubs is being greeted by strong opposition to the Lemma Government's proposals to put tobacco products out of sight in shops, ban vending machines and restrict employees under the age of 18 from selling cigarettes. Under the proposals, all tobacco products would have to be stored in covered dispensers, cupboards, drawers or under the counter.

The chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health, Anne Jones, said a ban on retail tobacco display was supported by 40 health, child welfare and community organisations: "tobacco display in shops is a powerful form of advertising that targets children and undermines quit attempts. These harmful and addictive products can and should be put out of sight."

Almost three-quarters of Australians support a total ban on retail tobacco displays, a survey by the Cancer Council NSW last month found.

But at a public forum at Parliament House on Friday, supermarkets, newsagents, service stations and tobacconists argued the measures would harm their businesses.

More than 2000 submissions have been made to the Protecting Children from Tobacco discussion paper, which closes on June 22, said Verity Firth, an assistant health minister. *Sun Herald, 1/6/08, p14*

Tobacco control: electronic cigarettes just a gimmick to beat smoking bans

Health organisations have blasted the new electronic cigarettes and cigars being promoted as a way to beat the bans in pubs, offices and public transport.

The battery-powered Egar is touted as a "healthy alternative to smoking" and delivers nicotine through an atomiser that creates puffs of vapour that resemble cigarette smoke.

"You can still have the sensation of smoke but you are not inhaling all the toxic chemicals associated with tobacco." Albert Nisman, the Australian distributor said. "There is no harm to others around you, as it is smoke free, and with the proposed new laws banning smoking in a car with children this product will definitely be a benefit."

Quit executive director Fiona Sharkie said the product was a gimmick that deliberately flouted the spirit of tobacco bans. "One of the many benefits of a ban on smoking in bars and clubs is that it encourages people to quit smoking or smoke less," Ms Sharkie said. "This product is clearly marketed in a way to get around these bans."

VicHealth chief executive Todd Harper said health claims about the product were dubious.

"To suggest this is a legitimate way to give up smoking is ridiculous and possibly dangerous," he said.

West Australian, 2/6/08, p17; Age, 2/6/08, p3

Tobacco control: NT fails on smoking

The Northern Territory is a national embarrassment when it comes to combating smoking, the Australian Medical Association president said yesterday.

The NT has been given the AMA's Dirty Ashtray award for anti-smoking performance for the third consecutive year.

AMA president Rosanna Capolingua announced the anti-award at a national conference in Hobart, coinciding with World No Tobacco Day yesterday.

"The Northern Territory's record on tobacco control is an embarrassment for a nation that is otherwise making good progress," she said. "Its lack of interest or action is particularly

disturbing given the significant contribution tobacco makes to the indigenous life expectancy gap."

Dr Capolingua said WA and Queensland were good tobacco control role models. "The WA Government has shown a consistent and strong commitment to tobacco control, with a particularly good record in banning smoking in enclosed public spaces," she said.

Sunday Mail Adelaide, 1/6/08, p21; Sunday Territorian, 1/6/08, p3

Treatment: drug mix breakthrough

The expensive anti-cancer drug Avastin slows the progression of a common type of advanced breast cancer when teamed with a chemotherapy drug widely used in Australia, a study has shown.

A landmark international trial involving Australian patients has proven the benefits of a new drug combination for women with the more common HER2-negative form of advanced breast cancer.

The findings, presented at a cancer conference in Chicago, have major implications for the treatment of the disease in Australia as the chemotherapy drug involved, called docetaxal, is already used nationwide.

Australian cancer specialists at the conference said the findings could change the way this type of breast cancer was treated, but warned benefits would only be reaped if Avastin got a government subsidy to bring down its price of \$5000 for a course of the drug.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said: "This is very great news for breast cancer patients whose disease has spread. But what really determines how widely this translates to benefits for Australian women is whether it gets listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Until then it's really out of reach."

Australian, 2/6/08, p3; Courier Mail, 2/6/08, p18; Canberra Times, 2/6/08, p6; Herald Sun, 2/6/08, p9

Cancer in the News is produced by Cancer Council Australia and is an edited summary of news items in daily national and capital city newspapers. It is aimed at keeping Cancer Council staff and stakeholders up-to-date on issues relating to cancer and does not necessarily represent the views of Cancer Council Australia.