

CANCER IN THE NEWS SEPTEMBER 2008

Nutrition: New call for clear nutrition labels

Health and consumer groups want an urgent overhaul of food packaging regulations on the back of new research which they say shows nutrition labels are confusing shoppers.

A survey of almost 800 adults in Sydney shows shoppers are five times more likely to identify healthy and unhealthy foods when they display so-called traffic-light labels rather than those badged with industry-preferred percentage daily intake labels.

Traffic light labels display fat, saturated fat, sugar and sodium levels in four separate colour-coded circles. Green means a food is low in the respective contents, while amber is medium and red high.

The research by the Cancer Council, the consumer group Choice and the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA shows that lower socioeconomic groups, which have higher rates of obesity, are six times less likely to understand the labels that are favoured by food industry compared with people in higher socioeconomic groups.

Cancer Council nutritionist Kathy Chapman said Australia was gripped by a growing obesity epidemic and the Government needed to act to ensure shoppers could use nutrition labels on food to make healthy choices.

PHAI director Mike Daube said the relevant ministers should override the self-interest of junk food companies and insist on a food labelling system that everyone could understand.

West Australian, 30/9/08, p5; Age, 30/9/08, p3

Prevention: Breastfed babes help stop cancer

A major study has strengthened the theory that breastfeeding significantly reduces a mother's risk of breast cancer.

Women who breastfeed for a year over their lifetime are almost 5% less likely to develop the disease than those who do not breastfeed at all, it showed.

The researchers said that while the reduction may seem small, breastfeeding for longer would cut the risk even more.

An analysis of cancer statistics by the World Cancer Research Fund showed the year did not have to be continuous, with breastfeeding two babies for six months each having the same effect, and the baby's health also benefiting.

Herald Sun, 30/9/08, p15

Risk: Talc ovarian cancer alert

Women who use talcum powder every day to keep fresh are 40% more likely to develop ovarian cancer, according to alarming research.

Scientists fear powder particles may travel to the ovaries and trigger a process of inflammation that allows cancer cells to flourish. Although previous studies have raised concerns over talc, the latest findings from the US suggest that the risks are much greater than first thought.

Now, researchers have urged all women to stop using talcum powder immediately.

Experts from Harvard Medical School studied more than 3000 women. They discovered using talc just once a week raised the risk of cancer by 36%, rising to 41% for those applying powder every day.

The study also revealed that the risks were greater still for those with a certain genetic profile. Women carrying a gene with the name glutathione S-transferase M1, or GSTM1, but lacking a gene called glutathione S-transferase T1 (GSTT1), were nearly three times as likely to develop tumours.

The findings, published in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention*, apply only to talcum powder used around the genital area, not on the rest of the body.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 28/9/08, p45; Sunday Times, 28/9/08, p34; West Australian, 29/9/08, p7

Risk: Mobile-cancer link denied

Cancer experts have backed mobile phone manufacturers' rejection of the latest claims of links between mobiles and brain tumours.

Researchers in Sweden said last week they had found evidence of links between mobile and cordless phones and one of the most common brain tumours.

Lennart Hardell, of the University Hospital in Orebro told a conference in London that young

mobile users had a fivefold risk of getting a benign tumour called acoustic neuroma. However, the Australian Mobiles Telecommunications Association rejected Professor Hardell's assertions, calling it "alarmist" research that "had not undergone a proper process of review by scientific peers. People can be confident there is no biological, medical or statistical basis to assert a link between mobile phone use and brain cancer," the association's chief executive Chris Althaus said.

Patricia McKinney, professor of pediatric epidemiology at Leeds University, agreed that there was no threat: "Overall, we found no raised risk of glioma associated with regular mobile use and no association with time since first use, lifetime years of use, cumulative hours of use, or number of calls."

University of Sydney cancer specialist Bruce Armstrong said: "It's highly unlikely that that statement [fivefold risk] is true. There's no evidence of any substantial trend to an increase in risk of brain tumours in younger people in Australia."

Sun Herald, 28/9/08, p30; Sunday Age, 28/9/08, p8; Sunday Territorian, 28/9/08, p44; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 28/9/08, p17

Tobacco: Court upholds smoking payout

WA's highest court has ruled that the family of a smoker who died of lung cancer can keep a \$600,000 payout in a decision that could have huge ramifications for lung cancer victims. Paul Cotton's family won the payout last year almost four years after he lost his two-year battle.

Unlike most asbestos victims, Mr Cotton did not have mesothelioma or asbestosis. He smoked about 15 cigarettes a day but lawyers for the father of four claimed his workplace exposure to asbestos drastically increased his chances of lung cancer.

Lawyers for the State of South Australia, Millennium Inorganic Chemicals and asbestos products manufacturer James Hardie argued Mr Cotton was not exposed to enough asbestos for the court to consider his risk of getting lung cancer had doubled. But yesterday's decision forces James Hardie to take its case to the High Court or face the possibility of action from smokers, Australia-wide.

West Australian, 27/9/08, p18

Treatment: Acupuncture helps heal women

Acupuncture can be as effective in alleviating the side-effects of breast cancer treatment as more conventional medication, new research shows.

The study, headed by radiation oncologist Eleanor Walker at the Henry Ford Hospital Department of Radiation Oncology, Detroit, examined 47 breast cancer patients.

Some were given acupuncture to treat hot flushes, night sweats and excessive sweating brought on by cancer treatment such as chemotherapy. Others used commonly prescribed anti-depressant drug Effexor or Venlafaxine to address the side-effects.

Acupuncture not only reduced the hot flushes as effectively as the drug, but also provided additional health benefits for patients, such as improved sense of wellbeing, increased energy and higher sex drive. Additionally, it did not have side-effects anti-depressant drugs could cause, such as nausea, weight gain and fatigue.

The findings were presented at the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology meeting in Boston on Wednesday.

Sunday Canberra Times, 28/9/08, p14

Tobacco: Parental smoking 'violates child rights'

A leading Perth respiratory doctor claims children's rights are being violated if their parents smoke anywhere around them, ahead of a new hard-hitting campaign warning about the dangers of passive smoking.

University of WA professor of paediatrics and child health Peter LeSouef said parents should not smoke around children when in cars or at home, even with windows and doors open.

"People talk about the rights of adults to smoke but I think the rights of a child are more important since they're an innocent party unable to voice their concerns," he said.

Professor LeSouef said every second child admitted to hospital in the first year of life with a respiratory disorder had parents who smoked.

Cancer Council WA's Making Smoking History campaign will launch a series of advertisements at the weekend calling on parents to make their homes and cars smoke-free

to protect their children from passive smoking. Campaign manager Susan Stewart said many people still did not appreciate the dangers posed by second-hand smoke on the health of infants and young children.

Public Health Association president Mike Daube said, "You should no more expose children to passive smoking as you would expose them to dangerous driving or other risky behaviour."

West Australian, 26/9/08, p45

Research: 100,000 for cancer battle

More than 100,000 women are being sought to take part in the nation's largest ever breast cancer study. The \$5 million study, funded by the National Breast Cancer Foundation and the Federal Government, will screen women with and without the disease in the hope of better understanding it.

The breast screens, as well as information about participants' lifestyles and cancer treatment, will be put in a database to help identify risk factors and treatment options. Sarah Murdoch, patron of the Foundation, launched National Breast Cancer Awareness Month yesterday. She said, "Our \$5 million will build the foundation for a national and even international cohort study. This will be a world-class resource, enabling cutting edge research. It could even provide a model for other cancers where screening is available."

Herald Sun, 25/9/08, p11; Daily Telegraph, 25/9/08, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 25/9/08, p7; Canberra Times, 25/9/08, p1

Risk: Brain tumour a familial risk

A family history of malignant brain tumours puts individuals at higher risk of developing the disease themselves.

Multi-generational medical information of 1401 people in the US with a primary brain tumour revealed those who had a first-degree relative with a glioblastoma had twice the risk of developing the same kind of tumour.

Those who had a first-degree relative with an astrocytoma were nearly four times more likely to develop the same tumour. There was also a 91% increased risk of having an astrocytoma if a second-degree relative had this form of tumour.

The findings supported the "hypothesis of a genetic contribution to glioma predisposition", the authors said.

Medical Observer, 26/9/08, p5

Risk: Study gives new twist to HRT, cancer controversy

In a surprise finding which is at odds with controversial earlier research on HRT, women with the most common faulty genes for breast cancer have been found to have substantially lower risk of developing the disease if they use hormone therapy.

But doctors say the results are not strong enough yet to suggest that women who are genetically at high risk of breast cancer should be routinely prescribed HRT.

The new study published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* found that post-menopausal women who carried genetic mutations of the BRCA1 gene reduced their risk of developing breast cancer by 42% if they took HRT.

However, in an accompanying editorial opinion, Dr Rowan Chlebowski from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Seattle, US, cautioned that studies in HRT were notorious for providing potentially misleading results.

West Australian, 25/9/08, p9

Treatment: Scientists use gold to kill tumours

Australian scientists believe they have made a breakthrough in an experimental heat treatment for early stage cancer by using gold particles to direct infrared laser light directly into tumours.

A team from Swinburne University in Melbourne say they have overcome a major hurdle in the use of the non-invasive and promising treatment known as photothermal therapy, which uses reactive compounds that absorb laser light and other forms of electromagnetic waves to heat and destroy tumour cells.

They have developed gold nanorods with a biological coating that can target cancerous cells. When introduced into a tumour, the nanorods selectively attach to cancerous cells, allowing researchers to target and destroy them with an infrared laser.

West Australian, 25/9/08, p9

Treatment: Labor to fund one-stop cancer 'shop'

A new centre of excellence detailed by ACT Labor yesterday will bring specialists together in a one-stop shop for cancer patients.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher said Labor would decide in next year's budget when the centre would be built at Canberra Hospital, but work was not expected to begin until 2012-13.

The Liberals said that meant Labor would have to be elected twice for the promise to be kept.

Ms Gallagher said, "At the moment, if you need to see your immunologist, your haematologist and your oncologist, you might need to go to three different appointments across the hospital."

The centre would also include a research component.

Cancer Council ACT CEO Joan Bartlett said the centre would be good for people who needed the services. "One of the complaints that people often make now is that treatment is segmented and the path isn't a straight one, they have to see a new person and tell their story all over again."

Ms Gallagher said the centre was part of \$33 million of spending earmarked for cancer services, most of which were flagged earlier this year. The centre of excellence will cost \$14.2 million to build, and \$10 million over four years will go to increasing services. Another \$9 million will be spent on a new digital mammography service and on extending free mammograms to women who were previously diagnosed with cancer.

Canberra Times, 25/9/08, p8

Treatment: Public medicines scheme opens up to patients

Canberra yesterday lifted the veil of secrecy over its decisions to accept or reject medicines for public subsidy, allowing the sick and frail to lobby experts overseeing the process through a new submissions system.

Agendas for expert committee meetings will be published in advance, including the drugs they will consider, for the first time in the 60-year history of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

"The new measure will increase the transparency of the PBS listing process and will benefit patients, carers, health professionals and consumer groups by allowing their input into the decision-making process," said Health Minister Nicola Roxon.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee's November meeting, the first to come under the new arrangements, will review more than 40 applications for drugs, including those used to treat breast cancer. The agenda was released yesterday, with patients and their supporters invited to give personal perspectives on the drugs.

Australian, 25/9/08, p4

Alcohol: Voters like the idea of higher alcopops tax

More than four in five Australians are willing to support the alcopops excise hike if the revenue goes towards keeping people healthy, according to a Newspoll survey.

And an even bigger share (88%) of the 1200 people polled would back a tax increase for cigarettes, it found.

The research was commissioned by the Heart Foundation, Cancer Council, Public Health Association, and Action on Smoking and Health to defend the controversial alcopops excise rise, now under threat in the Senate.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the survey results sent "a strong message to politicians" about support for the tax.

57% backed the excise rise no matter how the revenue was used. Approval jumped to 84% if most of the revenue went into disease prevention.

Professor Olver said the survey showed Australians strongly supported tax increases which could reduce consumption of harmful products while raising funds to improve the nation's health. "84% is an extraordinary majority, particularly for an issue like paying more tax".

Australian, 24/9/08, p9; Courier Mail, 24/9/08, p16

Detection: Survivor spruiks prostate testing

A prominent Tasmanian who has experienced prostate cancer is urging men to put their

fears aside and be tested for the cancer.

Tasmanian governor Peter Underwood said he believed men were reluctant to seek medical advice, or talk about their concerns, particularly those relating to their reproductive organs. He was speaking at a lunch yesterday to launch a new prostate cancer campaign, Prostate-TAS, by Cancer Council Tasmania.

Hobart Mercury, 24/9/08, p10

Public health: Take responsibility for health, men told

Men have been urged to take responsibility for their health to help ward off illnesses and diseases that are increasingly affecting them, and sometimes killing them, later in life.

Cancer, obesity, depression and alcohol abuse are major health issues affecting Australian men in 2008, national experts told the Men's Health Information Day at the University Club of WA.

Men are less likely to see a doctor with a health concern than women and tend to wait until a problem reaches a critical stage, which can make treatment less successful.

West Australian, 24/9/08, p53

Risk: 'Proof' of HRT link to breast cancer

Latest research promises to provide compelling evidence that hormone replacement therapy can cause breast cancer. The existing evidence is statistical, but Adelaide scientists have recreated the cell growth mechanism in a lab using human breast tissue, showing a direct link.

The Adelaide study in which they took tissue from breast cancer patients after surgery, shows there is a direct biological cause and effect. They have found the artificial progesterone used in HRT disrupts the natural hormone balance than normally has a protective effect against cancer.

Adelaide Advertiser, 24/9/08, p15

Detection: Medical machines idle

Multimillion-dollar medical scanning machines have been sitting idle in the Flinders Medical Centre basement and a freight shed at Adelaide Airport for at least three months.

The machines – a \$2.7 million magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) unit and a \$992,000 computed tomography (CT) scanner, are used to detect a range of conditions such as cancer and strokes.

The Public Sector Association claimed the machines had been sitting in storage for almost 12 months because they required new specialist staff to operate them.

Health Minister John Hill denied this, saying the equipment was purchased "early" as part of a \$153 million hospital redevelopment, to take advantage of exchange rates and saving taxpayers \$250,000.

Adelaide Advertiser, 23/9/08, p11

Detection: DNA test to fight cervical cancer

Scientists have developed a simple and rapid DNA test for human papilloma virus, the common cause of cervical cancer.

Doctors said the test, known as careHPV, had been shown to be 90% effective in picking up pre-cancerous cells when tested on almost 2400 women in the Shanxi province in eastern China.

Writing in the journal *Lancet Oncology*, British researchers said the quick and simple DNA test could be particularly valuable in developing countries which did not have resources such as well-equipped pathology laboratories to carry out pap smear screening.

Using a mini-lab bench top, the careHPV test was able to detect 14 high-risk types of HPV and identified 90% of the pre-cancerous abnormalities picked up by pap smears.

West Australian, 23/9/08, p7

Risk: Study alert on mobile phone risk for young

Children who use mobile phones are five times more likely to develop brain tumours, according to alarming new research which has sparked warnings that young people should text message and make phone calls only in emergencies.

The Swedish study, which was presented to a British conference on the impact of mobile phones on health, indicated that under-16s were more at risk of radiation from handsets

because their brains and nervous systems were still developing.

Researchers said people who started using mobile phones before the age of 20 were five times more likely to contract glioma, a cancer of the glial cells which support the central nervous system.

Professor Lennart Hardell, of the University Hospital in Orebro, Sweden, said radiation from the phones penetrated deeper into children's brains because their heads were smaller and skulls were thinner than that of an adult.

West Australian, 23/9/08, p1; Age, 23/9/08, p5; Sydney Morning Herald, 23/9/08, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 23/9/08, p28; Hobart Mercury, 23/9/08, p3; Courier Mail, 23/9/08, p7

Detection: Prostate checks up after 'Jones effect'

The number of men tested for prostate cancer surged after broadcaster Alan Jones revealed he had been diagnosed with the disease.

The 'Jones effect' led to thousands of extra inquiries about NSW's most common male cancer from middle-aged men and their partners.

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia CEO Alan Giles has been inundated with inquiries ever since Jones went public on July 3.

Hits to the charity's website more than doubled in the days afterwards, while calls to the hotline surged.

Latest Medicare records show a sharp increase in prostate specific antigen testing since Jones was first diagnosed.

Sunday Telegraph, 21/9/08, p31

Detection: Cancer size link to symptoms

Breast screening programs should, in theory, cut the number of women presenting with large tumours, but such patients continue to turn up.

A study this month attempts to understand why. The population-based epidemiological study of 1500 women found three factors that were strongly correlated with women having a larger tumour, the most important of which was the method of detection.

The risk that a tumour was at least 2cm in diameter was more than tripled if it was detected after breast symptoms, rather than through mammography.

Other factors include high BMI and the grade of the tumour. Study available from *International Journal of Cancer*.

Australian Doctor, 19/9/08, p19

Environment: Cluster fears escalate

Reports of possible cancer clusters have soared nationally, especially in Queensland where the ABC studios were closed and relocated because of cancer fears, though none has been verified.

Queensland Health is now assessing a Sunshine Coast sports ground, in the third notification of a possible cluster site in the past week.

Bruce Armstrong, who headed the panel investigating the 2006 ABC breast cancer case, said the number of suspected cancer clusters reported in media and scientific journals had jumped from an average one a year since the mid-1980s to 13 last year alone. A large number were in Queensland.

Professor Armstrong said people were increasingly sensitive to any perceived frequency of cancer cases in their workplaces or communities but said the vast majority were due to random chance.

Courier Mail, 20/9/08, p30; Sunday Tasmanian, 21/9/08, p8; Sun Herald, 21/9/08, p21

Obesity: Push to ban junk food ads in sport

Junk-food companies would be banned from sponsoring sports under a proposal by a group of powerful health organisations.

Experts say allowing unhealthy brands to be associated with athletic events is "socially irresponsible" and sends conflicting messages to young fans.

Public health advocates from groups including the Australian Medical Association and Cancer Council NSW say junk-food sponsorship is fuelling the national obesity crisis. They are calling on the Federal Government to stop unhealthy foods being promoted in sport.

Cancer Council NSW nutrition program-manager Kathy Chapman compared the issue to tobacco sponsorship – a practice that was banned. "We would like to see sporting

organisations only entering into sponsorship contracts that promote a healthy lifestyle to children.”

Sunday Tasmanian, 21/9/08, p9; Sunday Mail (Adelaide), 21/9/08, p13; Sunday Telegraph, 21/9/08, p30

Prevention: Women can more than halve their risk of death from cancer

Women can more than halve their risk of death from cancer or heart disease if they never smoke, keep their weight down, exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet low in red meat and trans-fats, concludes new research in the *BMJ*.

The study involved 77,782 healthy women aged 34 to 59. Every two years for 24 years they were surveyed about a range of health and lifestyle factors.

During this time there were 8882 deaths, including 1790 from heart disease and 4527 from cancer. The authors calculated that 28% of these deaths could have been avoided if the women had never smoked, and 55% would not have occurred if women had combined never smoking, regular exercise, a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight.

Weekend Australian, 20/9/08, p16

Tobacco: Millions up in smoke as gamblers told to butt out

Pubs and clubs have wasted as much as \$750 million on outdoor spaces designed to counter the indoor smoking ban, after a landmark decision in the Supreme Court classified them as smoke-free areas.

ClubsNSW had challenged the NSW Health Department in the Supreme Court after health inspectors threatened to prosecute Dubbo RSL for breaching smoking regulations in its “outdoor gaming terrace” and “TAB outdoor area”, which are partially sheltered by roofing.

The ruling comes as a blow to pubs and clubs across NSW, many of which had renovated their outdoor areas in preparation for the indoor smoking ban that took effect in July.

Wendy Oakes of Cancer Council NSW said the judgement had foiled a cynical attempt by pubs and clubs to ensure that gamblers did not break their concentration by going outside to smoke.

Sydney Morning Herald, 20/9/08, p1; Daily Telegraph, 20/9/08, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 20/9/08, p26; Canberra Times, 20/9/08, p13

Treatment: Plan to clone embryos

Cloned human embryos could be created in Victoria within a year. Researchers at the Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories plan to use therapeutic cloning for research following the landmark approval this week of a licence for fertility company, Sydney IVF, to create embryos.

They hope the research will lead to cures and therapies for conditions such as cancer, Huntington’s Disease, Cystic Fibrosis and diabetes.

Sunday Herald Sun, 21/9/08, p20

Tobacco: Pressure on Hames to douse smoking (WA)

Major health groups have called on the incoming State government to boost anti-smoking policies, with a new report showing tobacco is costing WA at least \$2.4 billion a year.

Cancer Council WA, the Heart Foundation and the Asthma Foundation of WA want a stronger commitment from incoming health minister Kim Hames that more will be done to legislate against smoking in public places and for further limits on cigarette sales.

Heart Foundation chief executive Maurice Swanson said the Liberal Party had offered very little commitment to tobacco control before the election and would soon face the acid test over laws covering point-of-sale displays.

Dr Hames said tobacco control was an important issue but he would not comment on specific measures while still not officially in government.

West Australian, 19/9/08, p11

Treatment: Radiation inquiry to focus on managers

A second inquiry into a radiation treatment bungle at Royal Adelaide Hospital will be finished by November, the State Government says.

The independent investigation, led by former Premier’s Department head Ian Kowalick, will focus on “the actions taken by RAH management” in 2006 after staff discovered 869 patients had been under-dosed with radiation from July 2004 to July 2006.

The investigation is expected to take six to eight weeks.
Adelaide Advertiser, 19/9/08, p31

Detection: Plan to tailor breast tests

A radical plan to scrap biennial mammograms and introduce tailor-made breast screening for women is being proposed. The BreastScreen Australia program could be changed in the future to earlier detect cancers in women.

Experts believe that women with higher breast density, or thicker tissue, could be screened more often while those with lower density could be checked less than every two years, without increasing risks.

A research paper will be presented at an international breast cancer conference, hosted by Breast Cancer Institute NSW, in Sydney, today.

Professor John Boyages, institute executive director, said methods of detecting and treating breast cancer were changing dramatically. "We are getting more and more into personalised medicine," he said. "What is controversial about this is the idea of less screening."

The paper, written by researchers at the University of Melbourne, suggests that varied screening intervals according to breast density could be introduced.

"BreastScreen Australia is currently less beneficial for women with high breast density.

Large tumour size at detection and higher rates of cancers detected between scheduled screens suggest that more frequent screening for women with higher breast density might bring some benefit," researchers said.

Hobart Mercury, 18/9/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 18/9/08, p15

Detection: Faster test for breast cancer

British scientists hope to soon be able to offer women a simple and quick genetic test to look for faulty genes linked to breast cancer. They say the test, which uses next generation sequencing to screen several samples of DNA at a time, could be on the market within a year and cost less than \$30.

The new test would be expected to produce results in a matter of days.

Scientists from Cancer Research UK, which is developing the new test, say it could significantly reduce the anxiety of women waiting to learn if they have genetic faults linked to breast cancer and allow treatment decisions to be made earlier.

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre's expert advisor in genetics, Judy Kirk, gave cautious support for the technology and said the group wanted to learn more about the new approach.

West Australian, 18/9/08, p13

Detection: Caton gives male cancer the finger

Australian actor Michael Caton wants to get Aussie men laughing all the way to their doctor. Caton, along with All Saints actor and Sydney-based GP Jeremy Cumpton, features in a new TV and radio campaign that encourages men to "make a date" with their doctor to discuss prostate cancer testing.

The TV sketch first went to air last week and will run until next March.

Hobart Mercury, 18/9/08, p5

Physical activity: Changes for a longer life

A pilot study of 30 prostate cancer patients by a team led by Australian-born scientist Professor Elizabeth Blackburn of the University of California has shown that lifestyle changes may prevent early cell death and lengthen human life.

After three months on a low-fat diet with moderate exercise and reduced stress, 24 patients showed increased levels of telomerase, an enzyme that helps control the longevity of cells.

The researchers warn that a larger study is needed to confirm the findings, which are published in *Lancet Oncology*.

Sydney Morning Herald, 18/9/08, p20

Prevention: Vaccine doubt for boys

Vaccinating boys with Australia's HPV vaccine does not improve cancer or genital warts rates enough for either sex to make it financially worthwhile, a report suggests.

It shows that immunisation rates for the cervical cancer vaccine, Gardasil, are so high that

dosing boys with the vaccine will give girls little protection from the disease. Benefits for boys in reducing genital warts and head, neck and anal cancers, were “questionable”, said Dr Matthew Law, from the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research in Sydney.
Sydney Morning Herald, 18/9/08, p20

Public health: Professors push to keep kids hospital

An influential group of professors warned yesterday that the closure of Royal Children's Hospital would cripple research into areas as diverse as childhood leukaemia, bone tumours, lung and liver disease, MS, mumps and Crohn's disease. No fewer than 11 University of Queensland professors and dozens of medical researchers are opposing plans to shut the Herston Hospital in favour of a new Queensland Children's Hospital next to the Mater in South Brisbane. Professor Harry Smith said, “It is a privilege in more than 35 years of practice in the pathology of blood disorders of childhood, to use the high-class research facilities of the Herston complex, a grouping of three major teaching hospitals and medical school which is unique in Australia. It will be difficult to do the same work from another site. In fact, it will be impossible.”
Courier Mail, 18/9/08, p9

Treatment: Vaccine eats cancer

An experimental cancer vaccine that shrinks and kills deadly melanomas is being hailed as one of the most exciting frontiers in the battle against the disease. Developed by Professor Jonathan Cebon, from the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research at Austin Health in Melbourne, the vaccine is based on a promising line of research being examined worldwide – that cancers have stemcells. His team's research has identified particular molecules unique to the stemcells behind melanomas. They developed a vaccine to target just those cells, allowing the body's immune system to take the bulk of the work disposing of the tumour. Professor Cebon emphasises that it is far too early to talk about a “cure” and says the cancer stemcell idea is just a hypothesis.
West Australian, 18/9/08, p13; Age, 18/9/08, p3

Prevention: 1 in 3 snub vaccine (SA)

Almost a third of girls are shunning the free cervical cancer vaccine being offered in South Australian schools. Health Department figures show about 50,000 girls in Years 8 to 12 were offered the Gardasil vaccine last year but about 16,000 – or 32% - opted out. In NSW, it was recently reported that more than 40,000 of 173,607 schoolgirls offered the vaccine – or 23% - chose not to have it. Some parents in both states had concerns about side-effects and the risk of encouraging promiscuity by giving the impression the vaccine made unprotected sex safe.
Adelaide Advertiser, 15/9/08, p3

Public health: Prostate cancer a mystery to most men

Australian men in the age group most at risk of getting prostate cancer do not know much about the disease, new research reveals. More than 500 men aged between 40 and 80 were quizzed on their knowledge of prostate cancer as part of a University of Notre Dame Australia study. Four out of five did not know the function of the prostate. Almost half did not know the disease was the second most common form of cancer in men behind skin cancer, but 58% thought getting the disease would lead to a rapid death. Researcher Alan Wright said the respondents' lack of knowledge about the disease could be due to men often not paying attention to their health. He said there was also a lot of confusing information in the public domain about the disease.
Canberra Times, 15/9/08, p6; Adelaide Advertiser, 15/9/08, p14; Daily Telegraph, 15/9/08, p16

Public health: No escape – Government must take blame for cancer bungle

The State Government has only itself to blame for a radiation treatment bungle that caused 869 patients to receive the wrong dosage for two years, Cancer Council Australia CEO

Professor Ian Olver says.

He said the Rann Government was warned about an increasing risk of a major radiation incident at the Royal Adelaide Hospital Cancer Centre in the months before a treatment machine was wrongly set in 2004.

The eminent oncologist is a former director of the RAH's cancer centre and is the first senior figure to speak out on the treatment bungler.

Professor Olver said the "ever increasing" risk of such an error being made in dosage settings on treatment machines...was made clear to the Government after he received a letter warning of this from then chief physicist Tim van Doorn on May 24, 2004.

"It (the letter) would have been raised with the hospital administration and no one (hospital management) turned a blind eye," he said. "They had to then deal with the department and the minister at the time in terms of resourcing."

The letter said there was the potential for a machine calibration error unless action was taken to correct staff shortfalls.

An independent review into the error tabled last week in Parliament found staffing problems were the main contributing factors.

Professor Olver said the State Government "ignored" constant lobbying to improve salaries to stop expert staff from being poached because they were the lowest paid in Australia.

Adelaide Advertiser, 15/9/08, p1

Risk: New school cancer cluster

An investigation has been launched into another suspected school cancer cluster at a Queensland school. Eleven staff at Deception Bay High School, north of Brisbane, have developed or had a number of different cancers over the past few years, including breast and thyroid cancers. Two of those were diagnosed before starting work at the school. Health Minister Stephen Robertson said a departmental investigation would look into the patients' backgrounds, their lifestyles and previous employment to see what could have caused the cancers. He said no students had been affected and none of the staff had died.
Weekend Australian, 13/9/08, p7; Courier Mail, 13/9/08, p10

Screening: Prostate test splits cancer lobby

...while there is little doubt that the prostate specific antigen, or PSA test, saves lives, it remains controversial. Advisory groups such as the Cancer Council are unconvinced that all men end up better off after being diagnosed, arguing that some don't live any longer but are burdened with unwanted side effects from treatment such as incontinence and impotence. They believe some middle-aged and elderly men are being over-diagnosed and treated for slow-growing cancers that would never have caused them any harm if left alone.

But advocates of PSA testing say it is a moot argument, partly because advances in treatment, including key-hole surgery, over the past five years means the chances of side effects are minimised, especially if the disease is found early.

Prostate Cancer Foundation chief executive Andrew Giles said men needed to be proactive about detection of the disease because there were few early symptoms. He said men, particularly those over 50, should talk to their doctor about their risk.

But Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said that in the absence of a clearly agreed scientific position on population-wide PSA testing, there would always be different opinions.

West Australian, 13/9/08, p19

Skin: Builders to get free health check-ups (QLD)

Building tradies will get free health check-ups in a plan to make Queenslanders healthier. Premier Anna Bligh said under the two-month trial, 1000 carpenters, bricklayers, electricians and labourers would get a half-hour general check and 15-minute skin assessment on building sites.

"Research shows because construction workers work outdoors, they are particularly vulnerable to skin cancer", Premier Bligh said.

The \$122,500 plan is jointly funded by the industry.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 14/9/08, p37

Skin: Antihypertensive drug could prevent skin cancer in men

ACE inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers may reduce the incidence of common

basal cell and squamous cell skin carcinomas in high-risk men.

A US cohort study of 1051 elderly men found those using an ACE inhibitor or an angiotensin receptor blocker had a 39% reduced relative risk of developing a basal cell carcinoma and a 33% reduced relative risk of squamous cell carcinoma over a four-year period compared to non-users.

The results are published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute Medical Observer*, 12/9/08, p16

Skin: Children encouraged to become shady shady characters

After years of Australian children learning their three Ss as well as their three Rs, authorities have added another two Ss.

It is now important not only to slip on a shirt, slop on some sunscreen and slap on a hat, but also to seek shade and slide on some sunglasses to be protected fully from the sun.

Yesterday the SunSmart organisation launched an initiative to encourage sun protection for children, using popular Play School presenter Justine Clarke as the voice of *The SunSmart Countdown* – a song that will be distributed to schools and early childhood centres to enforce the protection message.

SunSmart officials are pushing the message to children that shade is particularly important. Cancer Council Victoria shade consultant John Greenwood said research in south-east Queensland in the 1990s had concluded that shade alone could reduce ultra-violet radiation by up to 75%.

Age, 15/9/08, p2

Research: New sponge species may yield cancer treatments

Scientists say the “breathtaking” discovery of close to 80 new sponge species off the West Australian coast could pave the way for groundbreaking cancer therapies.

Researchers from the WA Museum and the University of Western Australia say they found 78 new species of sea sponges after spending nearly three years trawling the ocean floor as part of a \$4.2 million research project.

Sponges can contain powerful chemicals used in medical research and other scientific purposes, but little study has been done on those found in WA.

Sponges use chemicals as a defence mechanism, making them of interest to scientists and of value to the medical world.

The new sponges were being kept in a secure area of the WA Museum, awaiting further research.

West Australian, 12/9/08, p15

Obesity: Report links obesity and parent education

Poorly educated parents are more than twice as likely to have obese children as well-educated mothers and fathers, a new study reveals.

The finding has prompted a leading health education researcher to urge governments to address social inequities in favour of the “shame-and-blame” strategies that have not stemmed obesity.

University of Sydney Associate Professor Jenny O’Dea will present the findings on obese children and a survey of 345,713 adults to a parliamentary inquiry in Sydney today.

Dr O’Dea said, “The most important message from this data is that we have been operating since the year 2000 in a huge media and social panic about obesity in Australia and it hasn’t made one iota of change, especially in the low-income areas”.

The associate professor studied 960 families of children from Years 2 to 6 in 10 primary schools across regional and rural NSW. She discovered 2.7% of tertiary-educated mothers had obese children compared with 6% of mothers who had completed Year 10 or less.

And 7% of fathers in the low-educated group had obese children, yet the figure was 3% for those in the highly educated group.

Dr O’Dea said, “We need to provide education in schools about food and nutrition and cookery.”

Canberra Times, 11/9/08, p11

Screening: ‘Embarrassed’ women skip test

Australian women still let embarrassment and busy lifestyles get in the way of Pap smears,

with many avoiding the procedure for more than three years.

One woman in 10, aged 28 to 34, has never had a Pap smear, which is recommended every two years.

The online survey of 1003 women conducted for the Cancer Council found more than half the respondents cited embarrassment as the main reason they delayed Pap smears, while 45% thought they did not have the time.

Sydney Morning Herald, 11/9/08, p17; Northern Territory News, 11/9/08, p29

Tobacco control: More death away from Big Smoke (VIC)

Country Victorians are smoking themselves to death far more than their city cousins. The latest smoking figures show almost 4000 Victorians suffer tobacco-related deaths every year – with 119 in every 1000 deaths attributed to the deadly habit.

Eight of the 10 areas with the highest rates of smoking deaths are in country Victoria.

Cancer Council Victoria conducted the study entitled *The Big Kill*.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said it was important to pinpoint where the danger areas were so individual local governments and health services could undertake anti-smoking measures, with a focus on rural and poorer areas.

Herald Sun, 11/9/08, p13; Age, 11/9/08, p5

Treatment: Radiation bungle: 14 deaths

Fourteen cancer patients who received below-strength radiation treatments in a hospital bungle in Adelaide have since died.

Health authorities yesterday described the recipients as people with “very advanced cancer”, but said they were not in a position to say whether the “underdosing affected their survival”.

Hundreds of others treated on a faulty linear accelerator at Royal Adelaide Hospital between 2004 and 2006 would be unaffected, a review has concluded.

In all, 869 cancer sufferers were given a 5% lower than prescribed dose of radiation during treatments over the two-year period from a machine that was incorrectly calibrated.

NSW radiation oncologist Geoff Delaney led the review and reported: “In terms of clinical significance, it is likely that almost all patients will have not suffered as a result of the radiotherapy underdose because the underdose was relatively small.”

Australian, 11/9/08, p5

Clinical trials: Trial for sun spot gel

Biotech company Peplin begun phase three clinical trials of its skin cancer gel for the treatment of sun spots and precancerous lesions.

The trial of its PEP005 product, to be conducted in the US and Australia, will test the efficacy and safety of the gel for the treatment of actinic (solar) keratoses, a common pre-cancerous skin lesion.

About 250 patients, including 30 from Australia, will be randomly selected for the clinical trial where PEP005 gel is applied to an area containing four to eight skin lesions.

Australian, 10/9/08, p33

Prevention: Painkillers are linked to lower prostate cancer risk

Popular painkillers such as aspirin and Nurofen are being investigated as a way to reduce the risk of prostate cancer after research revealed they cut levels of a common biomarker for the disease.

But researchers say it is too early to know whether the lower level of prostate specific antigen (PSA) helps middle-aged and elderly men ward off the disease.

While reducing PSA could slash the risk of prostate cancer by reducing inflammation, doctors said it should not be assumed that a lowered level of PSA automatically meant less risk of prostate cancer because PSA levels could rise initially for reasons other than cancer.

The new study of 1319 men aged over 40, published in the journal of the American Cancer Society, found men who regularly used non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen had 10% lower PSA levels.

But little was known about the relationship between NSAIDs and PSA so the effect on the development of prostate cancer, regardless of PSA, was still unclear.

West Australian, 10/9/08, p17

Public health: \$31m in rebates for breast prostheses

Women who have had a mastectomy can now claim \$400 from Medicare for breast prostheses. Health Minister Nicola Roxon said yesterday the Government would invest \$31 million on the rebates for those who have bought a new or replacement external breast prosthesis since July 1.

Women seeking reimbursement can lodge claims now and Medicare will start payments from December 1.

The Government has also given \$12 million to the McGrath Foundation to recruit, train and employ 30 new breast cancer nurses, most of them in rural areas.

West Australian, 10/9/08, p12; Adelaide Advertiser, 10/9/08, p14

Research: Research needs more than crystal ball

South Australian scientists searching for new materials, drugs and cures for cancer say they are being held back by the lack of a local research facility.

University of Adelaide Professor John Carver said SA was the "only mainland state without an X-ray crystallography facility". SA scientists have to travel interstate or overseas to look at their protein structures, or trust others to do the work for them.

Researcher Dr Chris Sumbly is leading a \$1.3 million joint SA bid to the Australian Research Council for linkage infrastructure and equipment funding.

Adelaide Advertiser, 10/9/08, p13

Research: Award honours Frazer's cancer vaccine work

Brisbane scientist Professor Ian Frazer has joined the late Mother Teresa as a recipient of the prestigious Balzan prize, worth more than \$1 million.

Professor Frazer yesterday won one of four prizes awarded annually by the Milan-based International Balzan Prize Foundation. He will receive the award on November 18 in Rome.

Under the conditions of the award, at least half the prize money must be donated to a research project by a young scientist Professor Frazer nominates. "I'll set up a fellowship and look for a young, very bright scientist to carry on our work into...developing vaccines to treat cancer", he said.

Courier Mail, 10/9/08, p13; West Australian, 10/9/08, p4; Age, 9/9/08, p8; Sydney Morning Herald, 9/9/08, p3

Prevention: Give boys free Gardasil: doctor

The effectiveness of the cervical cancer vaccine Gardasil in preventing genital warts and two types of cancer in boys is being investigated by drug giant Merck as a local expert renews calls for males to get free immunisation.

Merck's Australian partner CSL is conducting trials in Australia and around the world to determine how effective a vaccine program for boys would be at reducing genital warts as well as anal and penile cancers.

Royal Perth Hospital sexual health services head Jenny McCloskey has renewed calls for a national boys' vaccination program. Dr McCloskey said boys aged as young as nine should have the vaccine because it prevented genital warts and anal, throat and penile cancers in men.

CSL spokeswoman Rachel David said the company would review its research and decide whether to submit an application to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee towards the end of next year about vaccinating males.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said it was difficult to recommend a vaccination program for boys before research confirmed its effectiveness.

West Australian, 9/9/08, p11

Risk: Tumour risk linked to phones

Long-term use of mobile phones can significantly increase the risk of developing brain tumours, a British lobby group says.

Collating 15 years of scientific research, the independent public information body Powerwatch said seven studies had concluded that mobile phones could increase the risk of malignant and benign brain tumours.

It urged the British Government to discourage children from using mobile phones and to issue leaflets warning of potential risks.

But several scientists questioned the research, saying no link between mobile phones and

brain tumours had been established.
West Australian, 9/9/08, p16

Obesity: Weight gain link to seven cancers

Overweight people are significantly more likely to develop a range of common cancers, a major study has found.

The findings show the extent to which an individual's risk of contracting seven types of cancer increases with every kilo of weight put on. People who lose weight can reduce their chance of developing the disease.

In the study, which is published in the *British Journal of Cancer*, researchers analysed data from around the world on obesity, weight gain and weight loss in relation to cancer of the breast, pancreas, kidney, colon, prostate, oesophagus and endometrium.

In the study, carried out at the Washington University School of Medicine in the US, the cancer which emerged as having the clearest link to weight gain was breast cancer in post-menopausal women. The risk of contracting it rose by 5% with every 5kg of weight gained. Research into colon cancer found that men who put on 6kg or more in weight ran twice the risk of contracting the disease as men who lost 2kg or more. Those who gained 21kg or more after reaching the age of 20 had a 60% increased risk compared with men who gained less than 5kg.

The study found links between cancer rates and increases in body mass index. Links between prostate cancer and obesity were less clear.

West Australian, 8/9/08, p13

Prevention: Vitamin cancer hope

A preventative pill for breast cancer, based on Vitamin E compounds in palm oil, could be available within three years.

USA pharmacologist Dr Paul Sylvester from the University of Louisiana has been researching nutrition and cancer, in particular the benefits of vitamin E, for more than 20 years.

"There is a family of compounds within Vitamin E. Tocopherol is the compound that is abundantly found in vitamins but the rarer form of Vitamin E, tocotrienol, only has a few natural sources and one is palm oil. We have found that the tocotrienol derived from palm oil can attack cancer in its early stages without the usual harm to surrounding healthy cells. It not only stops cells from dividing but will also kill the dangerous cells."

Dr Sylvester said a study has been conducted into mouse models with the breast cancer gene HER2 being treated with a daily tocotrienol supplement. "It significantly inhibited growth of the tumour in the animals," he said. "Now we believe we can develop a daily supplement for the prevention of breast cancer in women."

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 7/9/08, p42

Public health: Bid to ban junk food ads on TV backed

Health experts are backing a Greens push to ban junk food advertising during children's television programs.

Public Health Association president Professor Mike Daube said voluntary controls on advertising had not curbed the influence of fast food chains and confectionary and soft-drink makers.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver dismissed claims there was no evidence advertising restrictions would reduce obesity. He said previous governments had introduced bans on tobacco advertising in the 1970s well before evidence supported such a move.

"It is indisputable that companies who market unhealthy food are injecting hundreds of millions of dollars into TV advertising during children's viewing times. There is only one reason why they do this, because it works", Professor Olver said.

A spokesman for Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the Government was not planning to make any changes to advertising rules but would be guided by the Australian Communication and Media Authority, which will release its final report later this year.

West Australian, 6/9/08, p80

Risk: Tall men face heightened risk of prostate cancer

Taller men may be more at risk of developing prostate cancer, according to new research in

Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention.

Researchers studied 9347 men aged 50 to 69 – 1357 with prostate cancer and 7990 health controls. They found that the risk of developing the disease increased by 6% for every 10cm increase in height – a much lower risk than for other factors such as age and family history.

But it suggests growth factors and hormones leading to increased height could also play a role in the development and progression of prostate cancer.

One factor, insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1), may now be a promising target for prostate cancer prevention and treatment.

Weekend Australian, 6/9/08, p12

Risk: Prostate cancer linked to calcium levels in bloodstream

Men who have too much calcium in their blood may have an increased risk of fatal prostate cancer, researchers say.

Published by the American Association for Cancer Research, the findings showed men with high levels of calcium in their blood serum were at three times the risk of fatal prostate cancer than men with lower calcium levels.

West Australian, 6/9/08, p70

Tobacco control: Radiation alert over cigarettes

Tobacco companies should be forced by the Federal Government to reveal the poisonous chemicals in cigarettes and put radiation warnings on packets, according to a national anti-smoking group's WA president.

The Australian Council on Smoking and Health called for tough action in light of a report by US research that cigarette manufacturers covered up knowledge of a dangerous radioactive substance in tobacco for 40 years.

The report said the presence of polonium-210 in tobacco exposes heavy smokers to the radiation equivalent of having 300 X-rays a year and is estimated to cause 11,700 lung cancer deaths annually, yet the internal records of tobacco companies showed they avoided drawing public attention to the fact.

The authors of a study published in this month's *American Journal of Public Health* said cigarette packets should carry radiation-exposure warning labels.

West Australian, 8/9/08, p7; Sunday Age, 7/9/08, p6

Tobacco control: Ban al fresco smoking (TAS)

Smokers should be banned from lighting up outside Tasmanian office blocks and hotels to protect others from the dangers of passive smoking, says a leading health group.

The Tasmanian branch of the Heart Foundation wants tougher restrictions on smoking in public places as part of a push to stem tobacco-related illnesses. The foundation wants smoking bans in any areas where there are groups of people – including al fresco dining areas, beer gardens, malls and parks.

Hobart Mercury, 8/9/08, p3

Tobacco control: Black cloud over hubbly bubblys

Smoking a hubbly bubbly or tobacco waterpipe for one hour is as harmful as smoking up to 200 cigarettes, health experts have warned.

The growing popularity of smoking flavoured tobacco in waterpipes, particularly by young people, has prompted the NSW Government to issue its first health warning urging people to quit.

Health Minister Reba Meagher said there was a widespread, incorrect belief that smoking waterpipe tobacco, also known as shisha, hookah and argileh, was not as harmful as smoking cigarettes.

Chris Rissel, Health Promotion director at Sydney South West Area Health Service, said waterpipe smoke contained significant amounts of nicotine, carbon monoxide and tar, and higher levels of heavy metals such as arsenic and lead compared with cigarettes.

Sun Herald, 7/9/08, p16

Treatment: Lymphoma hope

Australian researchers have made a world-first breakthrough in developing a new treatment for one of the nation's most common forms of cancer, lymphoma.

A new study, funded by the Leukaemia Foundation, has found combining two new types of low-toxicity chemotherapy drugs can effectively kill tumour cells that are unresponsive to conventional treatment.

The discovery is especially important because it could reduce the high rate of lymphoma relapse, with only half of patients surviving five years after diagnosis.

Sunday Telegraph, 7/9/08, p25

Treatment: Death sentence for cancer cells

Tough cancer cells would be stopped with a drug designed to flick the death switch, says Professor Peter Colman from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

He says his work involves taking photos of molecules using X-ray crystallography "to see what it is, at the level of the atom, that makes molecules stick together".

Professor Colman is trying to find a way to stop cancer cells spreading by causing them to commit suicide. Deep inside every cell lies the machinery for programmed cell death or "apoptosis".

By using X-ray crystallography to look at the structure of the death switch, Professor Colman realised a drug could be designed to flick the death switch.

Herald Sun, 8/9/08, p14; Adelaide Advertiser, 8/9/08, p12

Research: Cytopia recruits for tests

Cancer researcher Cytopia has started recruiting patients with an aggressive form of brain cancer for the next phases of testing for its vascular-disrupting drug.

The company hopes to attract 35 patients with glioblastoma multiforme that has failed to respond to established treatments. The phase Ib/II study will take place in Australia and the US, including at a trial centre at Frankston Hospital.

The intravenous drug aims to halt the progression of the tumour by cutting the blood supply, and follows the company's earlier study of the drug to treat multiple cancer types.

Age, 5/9/08, p4 (Business Section)

Risk: Cancer link to 'heart' tablet

A drug used to treat high cholesterol patients could cause cancer, a new study suggests. Heart experts have called for caution over the use of Vytorin, which is taken as a daily pill. Australian Medical Association South Australian president Peter Ford yesterday said patients taking the drug should reassess their risk in partnership with their GP. "People should be assessed on their individual position and weigh up the risk of high cholesterol against the possible carcinogenic effect of the drug," he said.

The US has ordered an investigation into the drug, which is marketed there as Inegy.

Results from a controversial study published this week in the *New England Journal of Medicine* show a higher-than-expected number of cancer cases reported among patients taking Inegy.

It showed a total of 105 cancer cases among Inegy patients compared with 70 taking a placebo. That was an increase on the preliminary rates of 93 and 65 respectively reported in July.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said it was "a matter of watching the emerging data...The case hasn't been made that the result found in the single trial isn't by chance," he said.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration will review the new information and determine if action is required in Australia. It recommends patients on Vytorin continue to take their medication and speak to their prescribing doctors if concerned.

Adelaide Advertiser, 4/9/08, p11

Treatment: Delays can be deadly

An alarming Cancer Council Queensland report to be released today shows people who live outside the state's (QLD) southeast corner are much less likely to survive bowel cancer.

The report found men in regional areas were 30% less likely to still be alive five years after a bowel cancer diagnosis than their city counterparts.

The five-year survival rate for regional women was about 20% lower than for Brisbane residents.

Researcher Pip Youl said potential causes included access to medical services and whether the cancer was diagnosed at a later stage in regional areas.

But Ms Youl said the news was not all bad. Overall, five-year bowel cancer survival rates had increased from 48% in the 1980s to 65%.

The Cancer Council has called on the QLD Government to improve its "drastically underfunded" Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme to ease the burden on people who have to travel for treatment.

Courier Mail, 4/9/08, p17

Public health: Jab to ACT in report on inoculations

The ACT ranks last when it comes to increasing expenditure on public health programs such as immunisation and cancer screening, a report issued today reveals.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that the nation's funding for public health activities increased by 5.6% a year between 1999-2000 and 2006-07.

Immunisation – particularly the cervical cancer vaccination program – is responsible for most of the increase.

In the same period, ACT spending on public health programs rose by 0.6% annually, the lowest increase in the country.

Commonwealth, state and territory health departments invested \$1.7 billion in public health activities during 2006-07, according to Gail Brien from the institute's expenditure and economics unit. "Of all the areas of public health activity, immunisation showed the highest real growth at 31%."

"Another important area of expenditure was screening programs for cervical, breast and bowel cancer, which accounted for \$262 million or 15% of the total amount spent on public health activities".

Canberra Times, 3/9/08, p8

Prevention: Coffee and cancer

Women who drink a lot of coffee may have less risk of developing cancer of the uterus, a study released yesterday has found.

The study, led by Japan's health ministry, monitored some 54,000 women aged 40 to 69 over about 15 years, during which time 117 women developed cancer in the womb, according to the medical team.

The researchers divided the women into four groups by the amount of coffee they drank. They found the group who drank more than three cups of coffee every day were more than 60% less likely to develop uterine cancer than those who had coffee fewer than two times a week.

"Coffee may have effects in lowering insulin levels, possibly curbing the risks of developing womb cancer," the study said.

Daily Telegraph, 2/9/08, p12; Hobart Mercury, 2/9/08, p14

Risk: Perfume seen as risk in pregnancy

Pregnant women are being urged to avoid using perfumes and scented creams after research suggested the products could make unborn boys infertile or cause cancer later in life.

Edinburgh University researchers have found the reproductive system of male foetuses as early as eight weeks gestation could be damaged by chemicals found in perfumes and scented creams.

Professor Richard Sharpe, principal investigator at the Medical Research Council's human sciences unit, said the damage caused by some chemicals in cosmetics could lead to infertility or testicular cancer. "Although we do not have conclusive evidence that they do harm, there are components about which there are question marks."

The research in rats discovered a "time window" of eight to 12 weeks gestation when certain hormones in the foetus were activated and the male reproductive system was formed.

The study showed that the animals experienced fertility problems if hormones such as testosterone were blocked. As a result, baby boys were at risk of developing reproductive conditions later in life such as undescended testicles, low sperm count and testicular cancer, Professor Sharpe said.

West Australian, 2/9/08, p19

Treatment: Scientists 'crack' key cancer enzyme

Scientists believe they have opened the door to new chemotherapy and anti-ageing

treatments after cracking the code of an enzyme that plays a crucial role in both cancer and longevity.

American researchers at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia made the breakthrough by deciphering the structure of an active part of telomerase, an enzyme which is usually inactive in normal cells but is present in most cancers.

For more than a decade telomerase has been widely viewed as a prime target for the development of new anti-cancer drugs capable of shutting down the enzyme's activity, but scientists have been hampered by a lack of knowledge about its structure.

The researchers found a new way to map the enzyme with a technique known as X-ray crystallography.

In the findings, published in the journal *Nature*, key researcher Emmanuel Skordalakes said it was a landmark achievement which could lead to broadly effective cancer drugs as well as anti-ageing therapies. "Telomerase is an ideal target for chemotherapy because it is active in almost all human tumours but inactive in most normal cells. That means a drug that deactivates telomerase would likely work against all cancers with few side effects."

Cancer groups have urged caution, saying it was likely to be several years before the new generation drugs became available.

West Australian, 2/9/08, p3; Hobart Mercury, 2/9/08, p15

Nutrition: Fried breakfast a cancer risk

Experts claim that those who regularly eat a fried breakfast with the lot have a 63% increase in the risk of bowel cancer.

Data from the World Cancer Research Fund warns that eating 150g of processed meat a day – equivalent to about two sausages and three rashers of bacon – increased the chance of diagnosis by two-thirds.

According to the charity, the evidence was so strong we should avoid eating these foods as much as possible. Even a sausage a day could increase the risk by a fifth. The extra calories can also lead to obesity, which is linked to six types of cancer – including bowel and breast cancers – as well as heart disease.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 31/8/08, p44; Sunday Territorian, p21; Sunday Times, p37

Public health: Junk food ad findings unpalatable

Doctors have described as "unconscionable" a decision by the communications regulator not to impose tougher restrictions on junk food advertising which targets children.

Yesterday, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) joined the growing chorus of anger being levelled at the Australian Communications and Media Authority's stance.

"It is unconscionable to think that a considered review of children's television standards would not include protecting children from the influence of junk food advertising," AMA president Rosanna Capolingua said in a statement...It is absurd for ACMA to allege that advertising junk food to children does not influence their desire for and consumption of these foods."

Sydney Morning Herald, 30/8/08, p3

Risk: Incense use lifts cancer risk: study

Burning incense increases the risk of respiratory tract cancers, scientists have reported in the journal *Cancer*. The 12-year study by researchers at the Statens Serum Institut in Denmark is the first long-term investigation into incense and cancer risk.

Made of plant materials mixed with oil, incense produces possible carcinogens when burnt.

The study followed more than 61,000 people aged 45 to 74 who were initially free of cancer and observed the number who developed the disease. Participants were comprehensively interviewed on living conditions, as well as dietary and lifestyle factors.

Burning incense increased the risk of developing cancers of the nose, tongue, voice box and mouth, the study found. There was also a higher risk of upper respiratory tract cancers in smokers. But the link between incense and lung cancer was not clear.

West Australian, 30/8/08, p71

Skin: Skin cancers at a young age linked to genetic tendency

Certain types of skin cancers, particularly at a young age, can double the risk of developing other cancers later, according to research in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

People diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) – basal cell or squamous cell

carcinoma – had a two-fold increase in the risk of new cancers compared with those with no skin cancer history. For 16 years, 19,174 people were studied. Those who had NMSC between the ages of 25 and 44 were found to be at the greatest risk of new cancers. These skin cancers may indicate people genetically more susceptible to all cancers, say the authors, making NMSC a more important aspect of a medical history than previously thought.

Weekend Australian, 30/8/08, p12

Skin: Clare defeats solariums

The grieving mother of skin cancer victim Clare Oliver has welcomed the tanning industry's admission that solariums are dangerous. "I am pleased that they have publicly admitted it," Ms Oliver said.

In a major backflip, the tanning industry in Victoria admitted yesterday that solariums not only damaged the skin but were linked to an increase in skin cancer.

The Australian Tanning Association, its former president Scott Meneilly, solarium chain Body Bronze International and franchise Tropical Sun Industries agreed not to make false and misleading claims about tanning and to inform customers of the risks.

In the Federal Court yesterday, Justice Ray Finkelstein granted injunctions to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to settle a Trade Practices case brought by the corporate watchdog. The ACCC alleged that just days after Ms Oliver's death the solarium industry made false public statements and claims on internet sites saying tanning was safe. Oncologist and associate professor Grant McArthur, who treated Ms Oliver at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, said the industry's admission was an important step in the battle against skin cancer.

Herald Sun, 30/8/08, p19; Daily Telegraph, 30/8/08, p4; Weekend Australian, 30/8/08

Tobacco: Smoke rate in decline (QLD)

There has been a strong decline in the number of people smoking in Queensland, the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey has found.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson believes tough anti-smoking laws are behind the state's plummeting smoking rate.

There were 621,661 smokers in Queensland in 2004, compared with 584,094 last year. "Queensland has recorded the largest decline in smoking rates of any state in Australia," Mr Robertson said. "Since 2004, our daily smoking rates have dropped from 19.8% (of the population) to 17.2%."

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 31/8/08, p27

Treatment: Tiny lasers treat brain tumours

French neurosurgeons have successfully treated brain tumours through ground-breaking ultra-keyhole surgery, using a tiny fibre optic laser to destroy cancer cells.

Alexandre Carpentier, of the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital in Paris, said the procedure, carried out under local anaesthesia, was a "world first".

Eight volunteers suffering inoperable metastasing brain tumours had been treated in the pilot program, launched in December 2006. Five of six who have completed the program have not had a relapse after nine months.

A 3mm hole was drilled into the patient's skull and a water-cooled, fibre optic laser inserted. The device was guided towards the tumour by a scanner. Every three seconds, a computer checked for overheating and to make sure that only tumorous cells were being destroyed.

West Australian, 1/9/08, p14; Sunday Mail Brisbane 31/8/08, p54

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.