

## **CANCER IN THE NEWS APRIL 2009**

### **Prevention: Aspirin cancer aid**

Healthy people in their 40s could cut their risk of cancer in later life with a regular dose of aspirin. Taking aspirin for at least 10 years before the time when cancers normally develop can maximise the drug's effect, according to a review of studies involving more than 50,000 people.

Men and women taking aspirin are less likely to develop bowel, breast and prostate cancers. "Taking aspirin at this age, which is about the time pre-cancerous lesions usually begin to develop may be the best time to stop the disease from progressing to actual cancer," University of London Queen Mary Cancer Research UK Centre for Epidemiology Professor Jack Cuzick said.

The study, which reviewed all available evidence on aspirin and cancer prevention, was published yesterday in *The Lancet Oncology*.

*Daily Telegraph, 30/4/09, p18*

### **Public health: Screening battles cancer**

Cancer death rates continue to decline in South Australia with screening programs credited with saving lives. The incidence of prostate cancer has risen rapidly but the survival rate has improved because of early detection, a new cancer report shows.

The *Cancer in SA 2006* report, released this week, says 60% of cancer are in people aged 65 or older and only 7.6% are in people up to the age of 44.

In 2006, there were 8592 new cases of cancer diagnosed in SA and 3436 cancer deaths. The most common cancers in SA are prostate, breast, colorectal, lung and melanoma.

The mortality rate for all cancers was 228 per 100,000 for males and 142.8 per 100,000 for females.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 30/4/09, p9*

### **Public health: School children being graded on healthy habits**

More than 1200 Year 6 students in ACT primary schools will be surveyed on their health, activity and nutrition patterns during the next few months.

Students' weight and height will also be measured as part of the 2009 ACT Year 6 Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey.

The survey was conducted in 2006 and provides the ACT Government with a snapshot of students' attitudes towards physical activity and healthy eating.

Government and non-government schools will take part, with about 40 schools expected to be involved in the survey overall.

*Canberra Times, 30/4/09, p8*

### **Tobacco: Smoke bans**

Ipswich aims to become Queensland's first city to ban smoking at taxi ranks and bus stops and in the city's mall. The decision by the southern Queensland regional city follows the introduction by State Parliament of laws giving councils more controls on public smoking.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 30/4/09, p6*

### **Treatment: WA researchers find key cancer molecule**

WA researchers have made the world-first discovery of what they have dubbed a "pied piper" molecule in the blood that could hold the key to stopping cancer cells from growing.

The molecule, known as Liar, leads other molecules into enter cells, allowing them to trigger cell growth in common diseases such as breast and prostate cancers.

Scientists at the WA Institute for Medical Research said that discovering Liar, coupled with their finding of an enzyme, known as Lyn, which acted as a switch for blood cells, offered an exciting new target for cancer treatment.

The results, led by associate professors Evan Ingley and Peter Klinken, have been published in the world's premier haematology journal, *Blood*.

"Because Liar is present in every blood cell, this knowledge could help treat a huge range of conditions and diseases but where it has the most potential is in cancers of the prostate, breast, colon and blood where activity of the enzyme Lyn is heightened," Professor Ingley said.

*West Australian, 30/4/09, p13*

### **Detection: More bowel tests needed to save lives, say experts**

A million people who have taken part in the national bowel cancer screening program may not receive the protection from the disease they were told to expect because the Federal Government has not funded follow-up tests, cancer experts say.

Professor Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia, said testing is “not just about once-off and never again”. Research data showed the faecal occult blood test reduced deaths if repeated every two years, finding new pre-cancerous lesions soon after they began to develop.

A single test would “pick up some cases but nowhere near as effectively as a regular program”, he said.

“We don’t object to [the program] being implemented in a stepwise fashion...however, its potential is to save 30 lives a week. We think there is an urgency about this.”

Graeme Young, head of the Flinders Centre for Cancer Prevention and Control in Adelaide and a member of the expert group that drafted the program, said: “We are leaving people in the community floundering...knowing they should be getting the second round of screening within two years, and with no obvious plan for that to happen.”

Professor Young fears repeat tests will not be funded in the May budget. First-round screening was working, he said. “We’re picking up curable cancers and advanced [pre-cancerous] polyps all the time.”

Finlay Macrae, head of Royal Melbourne’s Hospital’s department of colorectal medicine and genetics, said the Government had staggered implementation of the program because of fears the states would not be able to handle the extra colonoscopy and endoscopy tests made necessary by positive stool tests.

That argument was weakened by the fact that states had increased their capacity and coped well, Professor Macrae said.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 29/4/09, p5*

### **Treatment: Cancer treatment oversight needed**

SA Health should introduce a new level of supervision for cancer patients across the state and act on outstanding recommendations from a previous report, a new report says.

Sparked by last year’s revelation of the underdosing of chemotherapy patients at the Women’s and Children’s, Modbury and Lyell McEwin Hospitals, the report makes 12 recommendations.

Prepared by Australasian health services consultant Communio, the report calls for new committees to be established to police cancer management throughout South Australia. If approved by the State Government, the groups would be held responsible for managing cancer risks at regional and state levels and for policing complaints and incidents.

The report also urges action on 107 recommendations of a previous investigation that are yet to be implemented. It singled out Country Health cancer services, recommending a complete review.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 29/4/09, p11*

### **Public Health: Canberra to chip in for Melbourne cancer hospital**

The Federal Government is set to approve money for a world-class cancer hospital and research centre in Parkville in Melbourne, health minister Nicola Roxon said yesterday.

The Parkville Comprehensive Cancer Centre, estimated to cost \$800 million to \$1 billion, would bring experts from the University of Melbourne, the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research and other cancer research centres together in a relocated Peter MacCallum hospital.

Victorian state cabinet has not announced approval for the project but a detailed business case has been done, and it is tipped to be a big plank in the next state budget.

The “world-class, cutting-edge” centre would advance cancer research, education and patient care, Ms Roxon said. “There will also be a dedicated cancer clinical trial unit.”

*The Age, 28/4/09, p3.*

### **Research: Statins cut prostate cancer risk: new studies**

Widely available cholesterol-lowering drugs known as statins drastically reduce the chance of prostate cancer as well as cutting the risk of heart attack, researchers say.

Three studies at the Mayo Clinic followed nearly 2500 men aged 40 to 79 for more than 15 years to examine the effect of statins on prostate health. The initial results are being presented at an American Urological Association meeting in Chicago this week.

Traditionally used for high cholesterol by lowering levels of LDL, or bad cholesterol, statins work by blocking the action of an enzyme which controls the rate of cholesterol production and limits how much LDL is taken up by the blood. Researchers have also noted that statin medications prevent cancer cells from dividing and may cause some to die.

The US researchers found men taking statins were less likely to develop prostate cancer compared with men who did not take the drugs.

*West Australian, 28/4/09, p3.*

### **Risk: Politicians warned about toxic chemicals as cancer rates soar**

A former Labor politician has called on the Tasmanian Government to act immediately to control dangerous and excessive chemical use in agriculture and forestry that he believes are causing unprecedented cancer levels in Tasmania.

Retired Lyons politician Andrew Lohrey wrote to all 40 Tasmanian parliamentarians last week calling for urgent action against this hidden killer. He wants chemicals already ruled by scientists and governments in Europe to be a dangerous threat to public health to also be banned in Tasmania.

“This is a horror story,” Mr Lohrey’s letter warned. “Tasmanian cancer rates have increased over 35 per cent in the last 10 years and are continuing to rise -- Tasmania is now rated as having the highest rate of cancer [excluding skin cancer] in Australia.”

Mr Lohrey said with cancers such as bowel, breast, prostate and lung cancer occurring at a record high incidence of 433 cases annually per 100,000 population, it was clear “harm is being done in Tasmania”. He believes the only explanation is chemical contamination of the state’s water supplies, which can disrupt hormone balances in the body even at minute concentrations.

*Hobart Mercury, 28/4/09, p5*

### **Screening: Breast cancer survivors to be given free screening**

An injection of \$3.5 million into ACT breast-screening services over the next four years will give a further 2000 women access to free mammograms.

At present, the service only provides free mammograms to healthy women between the ages of 50 and 69, but from December all women who have had breast cancer will be able to access the service.

ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher said the funding would fill a gap in ACT health care. ACT Australian Medical Association president Paul Jones said an expansion to the free mammogram service was overdue.

*Canberra Times, 28/4/09, p2*

**Skin: Sun hats in high school (WA)**

High-school students in WA will have to wear wide-brimmed hats to protect them from the sun if the Cancer Council gets its way. The council is urging the WA Government to make it compulsory for students to wear hats during recess, lunchtime and while participating in sport. SunSmart manager Kerry O'Hare is calling for an extension of primary school policy before another summer hits WA secondary schools.

Ms O'Hare said schools with teenagers failed to promote sun awareness. There were no high schools in the Perth metropolitan area participating in the Cancer Council's SunSmart program.

Education Minister Liz Constable said public high schools were required to have policies regarding sun-smart behaviour.

Ms O'Hare said high school policy was too broad and did not go far enough.

*Sunday Times, 26/4/09, p3*

**Skin: School hats push (VIC)**

Parents want secondary schools to introduce mandatory wide-brimmed hats, despite protests from their children that they are unfashionable.

Parents said teenagers should be forced to wear hats up to year 12 – just as students were in primary school under SunSmart policies.

Parents Victoria called for the new rules after a groundswell of support among parents following a warning from the Cancer Council that Australian teenagers had the highest rate of malignant melanoma in the world.

The council said skin cancers in Australians aged between 12 and 24 were twice as common as other cancers.

*Sunday Herald Sun, 26/4/09, p31*

**Tobacco: Outdoor smoking cut down**

Even if they're dining outdoors, smokers will be restricted when lighting up at cafes in Sydney's eastern suburbs. Waverly Council voted unanimously last week to order restaurants with 10 or more seats to reserve half their outdoor dining areas for non-smokers.

Waverly banned smoking on all its beaches in 2005 and Deputy Mayor Kerryn Sloane said this was the first step towards a total ban on smoking in outdoor dining areas.

*Sunday Telegraph, 26/4/09, p37*

**Treatment: A new nuclear weapon against cancer**

Canberrans with cancer won't have to travel to Sydney for scans next year with \$4.5 million allocated in the territory budget for a combined positron emission tomography and computer tomography machine.

Imaging director at Canberra Hospital Professor Graham Buirski said physicians had been campaigning for the scanner, which is an integral part of cancer management, for more than a year.

"It's been one of the significant missing links in ACT health...we have to send outside the territory to get it and we are the only major city in Australia without it," Professor Buirski said.

Professor Buirski said he expected the scanner to be operating by early next year – or sooner.

*Canberra Times, 27/4/09, p2*

**Treatment: Cost-cutting focus on chemo drugs**

Cancer sufferers may wait days for weekly chemotherapy if cost-saving changes sought by the Federal Government go ahead. Health professionals warn that the Government's decision to no longer pay for unused quantities of the anti-cancer treatments could prompt private pharmacists to dispense them only on set days, to minimise losses.

The drugs do not keep and residual amounts must be discarded once a vial is opened. The issue has raised fears that private hospital patients could be pushed to the over-crowded public hospital system or have to wait for a specified day of the week for their dose.

Under the changes, the cost for that proportion of a given chemo-drug not used – now met by the Federal Government – will have to be borne by the pharmacists or the private hospital administering the drugs.

Independent senator Nick Xenophon said the move was “the worst form of penny-pinching because it will compromise and jeopardise the treatment of thousands of cancer patients around the country.”

*Adelaide Advertiser*, 27/4/09, p10; *Hobart Mercury*, 27/4/09, p5; *Daily Telegraph*, 27/4/09, p10; *Canberra Times*, 27/4/09, p4; *Herald Sun*, 27/4/09, p12

### **Nutrition: Ban junk food ads: study**

Up to one-third of obese children would not be carrying the extra weight if there was no junk food advertising on television, a study suggests.

A complete ban on junk food advertising might reduce the prevalence of obesity among US children by about 2.5 percentage points, researchers calculated using a mathematical model. “In other words, given a baseline prevalence of about 17%, possibly as many as one in seven – or even one in three – obese children would not have been obese in the absence of food advertising on TV,” the authors wrote. “Comparable numbers of overweight children might have had a normal weight.”

The researchers, who based their estimates on previous research, said “limiting the advertising of high-calorie foods could well be an element in a broader effort to make children’s diets healthier”.

Lead author Dr Lennert Veerman, of the school of population health at the University of Queensland, said an ad ban would likely have a similar, but smaller, effect in Australia.

The research is published in the *European Journal of Public Health* online.

*Australian Doctor*, 24/4/09, p9

### **Skin: River life ups risk of melanoma**

Living near the river or coast is associated with an increased risk of melanoma, an SA study suggests. Analysing almost 20 years of data from Adelaide and 11 regional centres, researchers found living within 2km of the Murray River was associated with a 25% increased incidence of melanoma compared with living inland.

Similarly, melanoma incidence was 19% higher in coastal SA compared with inland areas, the study found.

“This geographical effect remains after adjustment for age and socio-economic status,” the authors said.

However, while geography seemed to have a significant effect on the risk of developing melanoma, it did not appear to affect a person’s risk of dying from the disease.

Melanoma prevention and acute care programs could be usefully targeted at people living in coastal and river areas, the authors concluded.

“There is a large elderly population in coastal South Australia, which requires input in preventative and acute health services in melanoma,” they said.

The research is published in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

*Australian Doctor*, 24/4/09, p12

### **Treatment: Warning on ‘quack’ remedies for cancer**

Cancer Council Victoria has declared war on “cancer quacks” by urging patients to rigorously question “miracle cures” such as macrobiotic diets and herbal remedies, and to talk to their doctors about them.

In a new guide to complementary and alternative cancer therapies, the Cancer Council has also advised patients and doctors to report rogue practitioners or treatment programs to Victoria’s Health Services Commissioner.

The guide includes a list of unproved and potentially harmful “therapies” such as high-dose vitamins, coffee enemas, electronic zappers, juices and shark cartilage, which can cause poisoning, brain damage and severe malnutrition.

It also includes a list of safe and effective therapies such as massage, meditation and acupuncture.

The deputy director of the council’s cancer information and support service, Dr Amanda Hordern, said she hoped the guide would help eliminate unethical “quacks” who usually target people in the final stages of their illness.

She said deaths had been linked to fraudulent “miracle cures” in Australia and that some organisations had sent families broke by charging up to \$100,000.

“This new information has been developed to help people recognise which therapies may be helpful and which may be making false claims.”

### **Treatment: Bowel cancer victims denied last-resort drug**

An Australian cancer support group claims patients with advanced bowel cancer are being denied a drug of last resort that can double their survival time, after it was rejected for government funding for the fifth time.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee is expected to announce today that it has rejected Erbitux on the ground of cost-effectiveness.

Cancer Voices Australia said yesterday that the decision meant many people would be unable to afford a treatment which had been shown to extend survival rates and improve patients' quality of life.

Erbitux, marketed in Australia by Merck Serono, is one of a new class of anti-cancer drugs which are tailored to a patient's genetic profile.

It costs about \$40,000 a year because it is not funded on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. It is estimated that two-thirds of people with advanced bowel cancer, or about 2000 people a year, could benefit from the drug.

John Stubbs, from Cancer Voices, said he was disappointed by the latest PBAC decision which reduced the number of options realistically available to people with late-stage bowel cancer.

"What is also disappointing is that this drug is available in the US and other countries such as Germany, with subsidies of some sort, so patients and carers in Australia are going to be asking why not here, too?"

Flinders University cancer expert Chris Karapetis, who led a global trial which showed Erbitux doubled survival rates from 4.8 months to 9.5 months, said Australia was falling behind other leading countries where the drug was now standard care.

A spokeswoman for the Federal Government Health Department said the PBAC had rejected an application to fund the drug last month on the basis of uncertain cost-effectiveness. It had rejected four previous submissions on the same ground, as well as uncertain clinical benefits.

*West Australian, 24/4/09, p13*

### **Risk: Cancer link to burnt meat**

Regularly eating meat cooked at high temperature to the point of charring could raise the risk of pancreatic cancer by 60%, say researchers. "Our findings in this study are further evidence that turning down the heat when grilling, frying and barbecuing to avoid excess burning or charring of the meat may be a sensible way for some people to lower the risk of getting pancreatic cancer," said Kristin Anderson, from the University of Minnesota.

The research, which found well-done meats cooked by frying, grilling or barbecuing formed carcinogens, was presented at an American Association for Cancer Research meeting in Colorado, United States.

*Hobart Mercury, 23/4/09, p3; Herald Sun, 23/4/09, p18; Age, 23/4/09, p12*

### **Tobacco: Nicotine gum linked to cancer**

Nicotine chewing gum, lozenges and inhalers designed to help people give up smoking may have the potential to cause cancer, research suggests.

Scientists have discovered a link between mouth cancer and exposure to nicotine, which may indicate that using oral nicotine replacement therapies for long periods could contribute to a raised risk of the disease.

A study led by Muy-Teck Teh, of Queen Mary, University of London, and published in the journal *Public Library of Science One*, has found the effects of a genetic mutation that is common in mouth cancer can be worsened by nicotine in the levels typically found in quit smoking products.

The results raise the prospect that nicotine, the additive chemical in tobacco, may be more carcinogenic than had previously been appreciated.

"Although we acknowledge the importance of encouraging people to quit smoking, our research suggests nicotine found in lozenges and chewing gums may increase the risk of mouth cancer," Dr Teh said.

"Smoking is, of course, far more dangerous and people who are using nicotine replacement to give up should continue to use it and consult their GPs if they are concerned. The important message is not to overuse it."

*Australian, 23/4/09, p5*

**Treatment: Anti-cancer diet surprise**

Would-be cancer survivors had their diet expanded by three menu items this week, with new studies extolling the disease-fighting properties of grapefruit juice, walnuts and wine.

The research hailing the apparent cancer-fighting powers of the three foods was presented on Monday at the 100<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Denver of the American Association for Cancer Research.

In one small clinical trial, researchers at the University of Chicago Medical Centre found that combining eight ounces (230ml) of grapefruit juice with the promising anti-cancer medicine rapamycin could increase the amount of that drug in the blood.

*Northern Territory News, 23/4/09, p29*

**Treatment: Nuclear imaging aid to chemo**

US doctors are using nuclear imaging techniques to measure the effectiveness of chemotherapy. A report in the journal *Clinical Cancer Research* described how they used positron emission tomography and computed tomography scans to see how patients respond. They monitored 50 people with high-grade soft-tissue sarcomas who were undergoing chemotherapy to shrink their tumours. Within a week, it was clear 28 patients were not responding.

This helped in the decision about continuing chemotherapy or opting for another strategy.

*Australian Financial Review, 23/4/09, p59*

**Prevention: Broccoli may reduce stomach cancer risk**

Fresh broccoli sprouts suppress *Helicobacter pylori* infections, Japanese researchers have found, potentially opening the door to the vegetable's eventual use to protect against stomach cancer.

Researchers randomised 48 *H. pylori*-infected men and women to eat either 70 grams of fresh broccoli sprouts or alfalfa sprouts per day for eight weeks.

After 8 weeks, the severity of infection was significantly lower for those in the broccoli cohort, measured with breath, serum and stool tests.

The researchers said, given the links between *H. pylori* infection and increased risk of stomach cancer, the findings could also have significance in this regard.

Broccoli contained sulforaphane, a phytochemical with possible cancer protective qualities, the researchers said.

The research is published in *Cancer Prevention Research* online.

*Medical Observer, 17/4/09, p14*

**Public health: Shutdown – Superbug closes RAH cancer wards**

A superbug has forced the closure and renovation of cancer wards at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Eleven patients will be moved from the cancer centre which has been hit by an outbreak of vancomycin resistant enterococci. VRE is harmless in most people, but can be fatal in more vulnerable patients.

SA Health said yesterday that the move was necessary to control the infection risk. Within two weeks, patients will be discharged so renovations, including pulling up carpets and other furnishings to make the area more hygienic, can begin.

Health experts welcomed the move as the best option but raised concerns that the infection could still spread.

RAH Cancer Centre clinical director Professor Dorothy Keefe said in an emailed statement that 11 patients had now tested positive for VRE within the hospital's cancer centre.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 22/4/09, p1*

**Skin: \$500,000 for melanoma vaccine**

Climate change is tipped to cause more cases of skin cancer in Australia. A company working on a melanoma vaccine said climate change would damage the ozone layer in some regions, boosting the risk of skin cancer.

Chief scientist at Canberra company Lipotek, Ines Atmosukarto, said, "Climate change affects ozone by heating the lower stratosphere where most of the ozone exists."

Dr Atmosukarto, a molecular biologist, warned tropical regions were expected to be hardest hit by climate-related ozone depletion.

Lipotek has received \$500,000 in Federal Government funding to develop its skin cancer vaccine, which is aimed at patients who already have melanoma. It is hoped the vaccine will induce the patient's immune system to attack tumour cells. *Canberra Times, 22/4/09, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 22/4/09, p16; Daily Telegraph, 22/4/09, p9*

#### **Treatment: Cost cuts delay vital operation**

Cancer patients needing urgent surgery are being forced to wait up to three weeks as hospitals keep operating theatres shut due to budget restraints. A \$300 million budget over-run as of last November forced the State Government to order area health services to cut costs by \$64 million this financial year. *Daily Telegraph, 22/4/09, p7*

#### **Detection: Urine test hope on lung cancer**

Scientists say a simple urine test can predict if a smoker will develop lung cancer. Researchers hope the breakthrough may be used to save people most vulnerable to the disease and curb the leading cause of cancer death [in Australia]. Jian-Mn Yuan, associate professor of public health at the University of Minnesota, and her team tested 491 smokers for a compound known to cause lung cancer in mice. Researchers found patients who had high levels of small molecules called NNAL metabolites in their urine were at twice the risk of developing lung cancer as those with lower amounts. Important information such as how long and how much each person smoked, as well as eating habits and lifestyle factors, were included in the results. Participants were monitored over a 10-year period and chosen from a group of 50,000 people whose blood and urine were also sampled. *Sunday Mail Adelaide, 19/4/09, p25; Sunday Telegraph, 19/4/09, p23; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 19/4/09, p34; Sunday Times, 19/4/09, p10*

#### **Public health: Aussie workers a health shock**

Australian workers are among the world's most unhealthy, a Monash University study has found. Only 5% of the Australian workforce get the recommended amounts of fruit, vegetables and physical activity. The study, one of the largest of its kind, is continuing to evaluate 750 people involved in last year's Global Corporate Challenge. The final results will be available after this year's event, which starts next month. *Herald Sun, 20/4/09, p12*

#### **Research: Gene key to cancer in women**

Australian researchers have discovered a genetic key that could lead to world-first cures for ovarian cancer. A major study will investigate if gene mutations are responsible for the cancer, which claims 800 Australian women each year. Lead researchers David Bowtell, from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, said the study could hold the key to prevention and increased cures. Prof Bowtell, Dr Gillian Mitchell and Prof Staphen Fox of the centre have been funded from Australia and the US to look at how many women with ovarian carry mutations in either the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. It has been known for more than a decade that women who carry either mutation have a greatly increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Prof Bowtell's Australian Ovarian Cancer Study examines the other side of the coin – how many women with ovarian cancer carry the mutation. Prof Bowtell said Canadian researchers had found 18% of women with the most common type of invasive ovarian cancer had mutations of the BRCA genes. His study aims to test the Canadian results and, if confirmed, he believes this will change the way ovarian cancer is managed, "given the stronger involvement of BRCA mutations in the development of ovarian cancer in the general population than previously believed". *Sunday Times, 19/4/09, p10; Sunday Herald Sun, 19/4/09, p9; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 19/4/09, p30*

#### **Skin: Lack of sun glaring error, doctor says**

A lack of sun exposure has fuelled an increase in vitamin D deficiencies and specialists are warning Australians to take action this winter. Those most at risk include babies born and

breastfed by vitamin D deficient mothers, people who spend most of their time indoors and those with darker skin or who cover their skin for cultural or religious reasons. Canberra Hospital paediatric endocrinologist Tony Lafferty said at-risk populations needed to be actively screened for the deficiency.

Westmead Children's Hospital staff specialist endocrinologist Craig Munns said the reported increase in vitamin D deficiency in Australia and throughout the world was a result of changing lifestyles and migration patterns.

Cancer Council Australia skin cancer committee chairman Craig Sinclair said it was critical to continue to promote a sun safety message: "Over the summer, it can take a matter of 10 to 15 minutes for the first signs of sunburn to occur." Its recommendation is that people get up to three hours of sun per week during the winter to allow the face, arms and hands sufficient UV exposure.

*Canberra Times, 18/4/09, p10*

### **Tobacco: Tobacco giants to fight loss of logos**

One of the world's biggest cigarette companies, British American Tobacco, has foreshadowed a High Court challenge if the Rudd Government adopts ambitious anti-smoking measures proposed by its hand-picked health taskforce.

British American Tobacco Australia, alongside Phillip Morris, Imperial Tobacco and the US Chamber of Commerce, have launched a stinging attack on a National Preventative Health Taskforce proposal to make Australia the first country in the world to mandate plain packaging for cigarettes.

In submissions to the taskforce's technical papers, published on Wednesday, they warn the proposal to ban company branding on cigarette packs could breach Australian and international law.

BATA says such a prohibition could leave the Government exposed to a lawsuit in the High Court, arguing such an acquisition of property – including brand logos and pack designs – on unjust terms would breach the Australian Constitution.

"Attempts to introduce plain packaging into Australia would see BATA take every action necessary to protect its brands and its right to compete as a legitimate commercial business selling a legal product," its submission says.

*Weekend Australian, 18/4/09, p4*

### **Treatment: Horror drug revived in buying time for prostate cancer victims**

Thalidomide may be a new treatment for prostate cancer after US researchers found it extended remission periods in men with severe cases.

Although the drug did not permanently stop tumours growing, in some men it nearly trebled the time it took before the cancer returned.

Recent research has led to the drug being viewed as a potential treatment for a range of cancers. In the latest US study, at the National Institute of Cancer in Maryland, thalidomide was combined with existing treatments to suppress production of testosterone, the hormone that helps many prostate tumours grow.

*Sunday Territorian, 19/4/09, p45*

### **Research: Cancer centre opens**

The newly created Centre for Cancer Biology at the Royal Adelaide Hospital will put South Australia on the map as having excellence in cancer research. Scientist Professor Ian Frazer said the centre was a significant step towards cancer control, not only in SA but also across the world.

Professor Frazer yesterday officially opened the centre, that will run a \$3.7 million project to find out what goes wrong in cells that turn cancerous. Health Minister John Hill said the centre was worth more than \$10 million each year to the state.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 17/4/09, p6*

### **Tobacco: Greens up in smoke**

Smokers may increase their risk of colon cancer by eating fruit and vegetables. A high intake of fruit and vegetables appeared to reduce the risk among non-smokers but seemed to have the reverse effect on smokers, the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment said.

“Protection against colon cancer through the consumption of vegetables and fruit therefore appears to depend on smoking habits,” it said.  
Official Hans Verhagen said this didn’t mean smokers should avoid greens. “On the contrary. The conclusion is to please stop smoking,” he said.  
Some 500,000 people in European countries were quizzed about their eating and smoking habits, and studied for 8 □ years.  
Authors of the study, published in the *American Journal for Clinical Nutrition*, said substances in fruit and vegetables might raise tobacco smoke’s carcinogenic potential.  
*Herald Sun, 17/4/09, p21; Australian, 17/4/09, p8*

#### **Tobacco: It’s death or taxes, says heart foundation boss**

The nation’s most prominent heart disease lobby group has called for a tobacco tax hike and a national overhaul of food standards.  
Both measures are part of a national cardiovascular disease action plan the Heart Foundation is urging the Federal Government to adopt, amid fears an increasingly sedentary and overweight population could drive up cardiovascular disease death rates.  
Speaking at the National Press Club yesterday, foundation chief executive officer Lyn Roberts urged the Government to include a 21% tax increase – 7.5c a cigarette – in the May budget. The foundation maintains such an increase would cajole 130,000 adults into quitting, and prevent 35,000 children from lighting up.  
*Canberra Times, 16/4/09, p5; Australian, 16/4/09, p3; Courier Mail, 16/4/09, p17*

#### **Treatment: Prostate cancer treatment hope**

An experimental treatment that takes an entirely new approach to fighting prostate cancer extended survival in a late-stage study, its maker announced this week.  
Seattle-based Dendreon Corporation said that its Provenge cancer vaccine improved overall survival when compared to a dummy treatment in a study of 512 men with advanced disease. No survival details or information on side effects were given but full results will be presented at an American Urological Association meeting later this month, and Dendreon said it would seek federal approval of the treatment later this year.  
*Northern Territory News, 16/4/09, p17*

#### **Treatment: Cancer trial crunched by global crisis**

Biotech Novogen’s US subsidiary has decided to undertake an interim analysis of its “Ovature” trial for ovarian cancer treatment. It says slowing patient recruitment rates and the global financial crisis has made it imprudent to fund the trial to completion.  
The Ovature (Ovarian Tumour Response) study is trialling the anti-cancer drug phenoxodiol in women with advanced ovarian cancer to determine its safety and effectiveness when used in combination with the chemotherapy drug carboplatin.  
Novogen said its United States subsidiary, Marshall Edwards, had announced that new patient recruitment to the Ovature trial would cease and available data from 141 patients would be analysed.  
*Canberra Times, 16/4/09, p15; Courier Mail, 16/4/09, p60*

#### **Tobacco: Price factor to butt smokes**

Raising the cost of a packet of cigarettes by half would prompt the vast majority of smokers to try to quit, a poll shows.  
The Cancer Council Victoria research found 74% of smokers would “try and quit” if prices were increased by 50% to about the \$20 mark for a packet of 30 cigarettes.  
60% of smokers also said they would try to smoke fewer cigarettes if the price was to be substantially hiked.  
The telephone poll, which took in the responses of 4500 smokers and non-smokers, also found 81% approved of increasing tax on cigarettes if the money went towards services to assist smokers to quit. More than 60% of current smokers were also in favour of a tax increase on cigarettes.  
Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said the poll results showed the important role price played in terms of driving a further drop in smoking rates.  
“With tobacco claiming 15,000 Australian lives and costing the community \$31.5 billion every year it is critical that...price increases are implemented as soon as possible.”

Hobart Mercury, 15/4/09, p6; Daily Telegraph, 15/4/09, p7; Herald Sun, 15/4/09, p11

### **Research: cancer find could end biopsies**

A drop of blood or speck of tissue no bigger than a full stop could soon be all that is required to diagnose cancers and assess their response to treatment, research suggests.

New technology that allows cancer proteins to be analysed in tiny samples could spell the end of surgical biopsies, which involve removing lumps of tissue, often under general anaesthetic.

Researchers at Stanford University, California, have developed a machine that separates cancer-associated proteins by means of their electric charge, which varies according to modifications on the protein's surface. Antibodies, immune system agents that bind to specific molecules, are then used to identify the relative amounts and positions of different proteins. The technique was able to detect varying levels of activity of common cancer genes in human lymphoma samples and even distinguish between different lymphoma types.

The researchers said the same system could be used to monitor cancer treatment more quickly and easily. Although the study focused on blood cancers, scientists also hope to apply the technique to solid tumours and are currently testing the technique of head and neck tumours.

The researchers who reported their findings online in the journal *Nature Medicine*, said more research was needed before the technology became widely available.

*Australian*, 14/4/09, p8; *Sunday Mail Brisbane*, 12/4/09, p2; *Sunday Times*, 12/4/09, p25; *Sunday Telegraph*, 12/4/09, p18; *Sunday Mail Adelaide*, 12/4/09, p14

### **Research: soy could cut cancer risk**

Women who drink soya lattes, eat tofu sausages and prefer soy to cows' milk may be helping to reduce their risk of getting bowel cancer, research suggests.

Those, especially over-50s who consume a lot of soy can "significantly" cut their risk of developing the disease, according to a study by the Vanderbilt University school of medicine in Nashville, Tennessee, and published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

The study of the diet and health of 68,412 women aged 40 to 70 in Shanghai concluded: "After adjustment for age, birth calendar year and total energy intake, consumption of soy foods was significantly associated with a decreased risk of colorectal cancer. We found that risk of colorectal cancer decreased with increasing soy food intake, primarily among post-menopausal women."

The findings may help explain why fewer people in countries where soy is a staple part of the diet develop bowel cancer compared with those in Western countries, where consumption is low.

*Sunday Age*, 12/4/09, p10

### **Research: cancer survivors are well adjusted**

Patients who survive cancer are no more likely to be anxious or depressed than people who have never had the disease, a study suggests.

However, the findings also scotched the idea that by confronting their own mortality, cancer survivors gain a perspective on life that makes them mental-illness proof.

The study of more than 860 NSW adults diagnosed with cancer found that anxiety and depression levels were low five years later. (*MJA* 2009:190:94-98).

*Australian Doctor*, 10/4/09, p4

### **Risk: the night shift link to cancer**

The Cancer Council is urging people not to panic over the link between breast cancer and shift work, following a government's decision to offer compensation to victims. It follows the Danish Government's ruling to start awarding compensation to women who have developed breast cancer after years of working on the night shift.

So far, 40 women have received payouts after the Danes responded to research conducted by the World Health Organisation. A report in 2007 placed shift work along with diesel engine exhaust fumes as a "possible human carcinogen".

But Cancer Council NSW CEO Dr Andrew Penman said the research was still inconclusive.

"While on theoretical grounds some have suggested that disturbances to the sleep-wake cycle may increase cancer risk by affecting melatonin levels, in reality it is difficult to disentangle shift work from many other lifestyle factors among people with cancer," he said.

"So we are more cautious in our interpretation of the evidence used in the International Agency for Research on Cancer report. The evidence is far from compelling."  
*Daily Telegraph, 11/4/09, p30*

#### **Risk: worries on chemicals' cancer link**

Warnings have been issued over a cancer linked weedkiller widely used in Tasmanian forestry and farming. New research indicates State Government guidelines on the use of triazine herbicides may be insufficient.

A government report has found that triazine lingers twice as long in cooler environments as initially thought. The State Government admitted it was concerned and confirmed a review of controls on the use of triazine herbicides was being done.

The revelation has renewed calls for a ban on the use of carcinogenic agents that are regularly detected in Tasmania's waterways.

However, the forestry industry says a ban would have a dire impact on productivity and viability and Forestry Industries Association of Tasmania chairman Julian Amos even denied there was proof the chemical was detrimental to health.

*Hobart Mercury, 13/4/09, p9*

#### **Screening: cervical screening rates of the rise**

Participation rates in the cervical cancer screening program are the highest they have been in almost a decade, according to figures released as the Federal Government considers future changes to the program.

In 2006-2007, 61% of women in the target group aged 20-69 participated in the National Cervical Screening Program - the highest figure since a national media campaign in 1998 yielded a participation rate of 63.4% - data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed.

The figures come as Australian experts grapple with how to revise the program in response to the introduction of HPV vaccination.

Dr Julia Brotherton, as epidemiologist at the Victorian Cytology Service, told Australian Doctor that emerging international data certainly suggested "the screening interval may be able to be safely extended to three years, and that HPV testing may be a more appropriate primary screening test in the post-vaccination era."

The Federal Health Department has made a proposal to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council to renew the cervical screening program, "in light of contemporary knowledge about cervical cancer and taking into account the impact of HPV vaccination." However, a department spokeswoman would not say what changes were proposed.

*Australian Doctor, 10/4/09, p7; Medical Observer, 10/4/09, p3*

#### **Skin: camera reveals skin damage in a flash**

A new camera that gives instant images of skin damage is proving a wake up call for Queensland sun worshippers.

The digital camera, which is the only one of its type in Australia, reveals damage to the lower layers of facial skin as black areas - highlighting the risk of skin cancer.

It is being used as part of a groundbreaking Queensland University of Technology project investigating damage caused by sunbaking.

Professor Michael Kimlin, of QUT's AusSun Research Laboratory, said teenagers often believed they were invincible. "Unfortunately young people still spend hours sunbaking on the beach and think a tan is a fashionable accessory," he said. "The benefit of the new camera is that people can see the damage there and then, and have irrefutable evidence that not protecting their skin is having consequences."

Professor Kimlin said he hoped in the future the technology would be rolled out across pharmacies for people to drop in and have their skin analysed.

The University is now looking for Queenslanders who want to take advantage of the technology and be part of the skin cancer study.

*Courier Mail, 11/4/09, p34*

#### **Support: easing burden of cancer carers**

Support groups, help decrease anxiety, depression and stress in carers of cancer patients, a Tasmanian study has found.

Dominique Higgins of Anglicare Tasmania, said previous research had shown carers took on

a burden comparable to the patient's experience. Now the carer role was more stressful, she said.

"The status of cancer has shifted from an acute disease to that of a chronic disease, involving increased outpatient services, earlier discharge from hospital and growth in survival," said Ms Higgins who studies at the University of Tasmania.

These changes increased informal care, which disrupted family structures and caused fear, uncertainty and financial and emotional stress. But carers had much less depression, anxiety and stress after six weeks with support groups.

*Hobart Mercury, 13/4/09, p11*

#### **Treatment: a prostate lifesaver**

Doctors within three years may have a powerful weapon in the battle against prostate cancer. Tests suggest a once-a-day pill shrinks tumours or stops them from growing.

The drug cut signs of the disease in men with tumours so advanced they otherwise were untreatable. US researchers said the drug could provide a life-saver if given in the early stages of the illness.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 10/4/09, p28*

#### **Treatment: cumulative CT use alert**

Doctors are being reminded about the importance of judicious use of CT, as research shows multiple scans lead to a cumulative radiation dose, which increases the risk of cancer.

Of more than 31,000 patients who underwent CT scans at a US medical centre over 22 years, an estimated 7% had radiation exposure that was associated with a more than 1% lifetime risk of developing radiation induced cancer.

An online tool to assist doctors in determining the need for diagnostic imaging has been developed by the WA Government.

*Australian Doctor, 10/4/09, p2*

#### **Clinical trials: trials offer hope for ovarian cancer**

British scientists have developed and clinically tested a drug that could prolong the lives of thousands of women with one of the most aggressive cancers.

It is more than a decade since doctors have had a new weapon at their disposal with which to tackle the disease, but if further trials confirm the effectiveness of the new drug, it could be available within five years, researchers say.

A clinical trial of the drug, code named CNT0328, has been carried out at the Centre for Experimental Cancer Medicine, part of Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Eight of the 18 women involved found their tumours stabilised or shrank while they were taking part, which should mean they live longer than doctors originally expected. It is an unusually high proportion for an experimental cancer drug study. Typically only between 5 and 20% of participants secure any benefit from taking untried treatments.

A professor of gynaecological oncology at Barts hospital in London and chief investigator of the trial, Iain McNeish, said "we have taken the drug from the laboratory into patients and the results are promising." Professor McNeish hopes that if further trials confirm the drug's potential, it could prove as effective in tackling ovarian cancer as Herceptin has been in breast cancer. The new drug works in a similar way to Herceptin.

"The dream scenario is that a combination of the existing chemotherapy drugs and this type of antibody will be a big breakthrough and open up a new avenue for the treatment of ovarian cancer," Professor McNeish said.

*Canberra Times, 9/4/09, p14*

#### **Research: cancer crusader**

Three-day-old broccoli sprouts suppress infections of *Helicobacter pylori*, a major cause of stomach cancer, American researchers report in the journal *Cancer Prevention Research*.

They studied 48 *Helicobacter*-infected Japanese men and women and randomly assigned them to eat 70 grams of fresh broccoli, or an equivalent amount of alfalfa sprouts, daily for eight weeks. Bacteria levels were significantly lower among the broccoli eaters.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 9/4/09, p17*

#### **Research: gene clue for treatment**

Australian scientists have discovered that a particular gene combination is linked with a better prognosis for women with ovarian cancer - a finding that could have a significant effect on treatment.

Researchers at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research led a team that studied the ABCB1 gene which is responsible for the body's ability to transport a range of anti-cancer drugs.

Women with certain ABCB1 gene variations and minimal residual disease experienced a significantly longer period before relapsing after treatment.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 9/4/09, p17*

#### **Skin: surge in melanoma (International)**

Melanoma, the deadliest kind of skin cancer, is now the most common in young British women.

Skin cancer has overtaken cervical cancer as the form of the disease striking women in their 20s, according to data from Cancer Research United Kingdom.

Younger people are not generally those most susceptible to melanoma. Rates of skin cancer are typically highest in people over age 75.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 9/4/09, p66*

#### **Nutrition: wheat with health perks**

Developers of genetically modified wheat designed to help reduce obesity, fight diabetes and improve bowel health aim to have a product on the market within four years.

Field testing is under way on a high amylose wheat variety which contains more resistant starch, so it is not digested in the small intestine, instead passing to the large intestine, where it is broken down slowly in the lower bowel.

The potential benefits of resistant starch include a lower risk of colorectal cancer and could help manage diabetes and reduce obesity, due to its slower digestibility creating a feeling of "fullness".

The project, a joint venture between Grains and Research Development Corporation, CSIRO's Food Futures Flagship and French grower-owned company Limagrain, is developing GM and non GM varieties.

CSIRO research Matthew Morell said the GM variety was further ahead in the development phase, with trials under way in the Eastern States.

*West Australian, 8/4/09, p57*

#### **Skin: sun safe grant launched (WA)**

A new project aimed at curbing melanoma skin cancer has been launched in WA.

Under the skin cancer awareness campaign, backed with sponsorship from Suncorp, schools and sporting groups can apply for portable shade tents to protect children from the sun.

The campaign will also direct funds to the WA Institute for Medical Research's Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre to find better treatments for melanoma, which leads to 130 deaths a year.

*West Australian, 8/4/09, p52*

#### **Skin: skin cancer gene finding**

Up to 70% of melanoma skin cancers may be triggered by a gene mutation that causes cells to become cancerous after excessive exposure to the sun, researchers said today.

The discovery could lead to better treatments for the most deadly form of skin cancer after scientists at Britain's Institute of Cancer Research found the BRAF gene mutation was often the first event in the cascade of changes leading to melanoma.

Scientists already knew the gene was often damaged in patients with melanoma, but it was unclear if this was a cause or effect of the cancer.

*MX Sydney, 7/4/09, p6; MX Melbourne, 7/4/09, p10*

#### **Nutrition: More spin than nutrition**

Confusing nutritional claims made by popular breakfast cereals are misleading parents who want to make healthy choices, an Adelaide nutritionist says.

Child welfare group The Parents Jury yesterday condemned three popular breakfast treats as "cereal offenders" for being "heavy on marketing spin and light on good nutrition".

Nutrition Professionals Australia dietician Tania Ferraretto said parents were often overloaded by the nutritional claims carried on cereal boxes.

"There's too much information for sure. Everyone's in a hurry, mums particularly, and it's easy just to grab something if it looks healthy," she said yesterday.

"What we would encourage people to do is look at the nutritional panel rather than just believing claims made on the front of the pack."

*Adelaide Advertiser, 7/4/09, p11; West Australian, 7/4/09, p3*

### **Tobacco: NT puffing laws butt of jokes on smokes**

Respiratory specialists have fingered Territory smoking legislation as the worst in the country, at a lung disease conference in Darwin.

And they – along with anti-smoking groups – are also calling on the NT Government to reveal its draft legislation on smoking bans in pubs and clubs, which it first announced nearly nine months ago.

Thoracic Society conference speaker and Darwin public health physician Dr David Thomas said the Government had to shoulder some blame that Territorians were the biggest smokers in the country.

He said 56% of indigenous and 31% of non-indigenous Territorians smoked but less than 20% of all Australians did.

He wants the NT Government to go beyond smoking bans in pubs and clubs with its legislation and ban smoking in cars where passengers are under 15 years old.

He also said he wanted it to follow in the Health Department's footsteps and announce bans in all government buildings – especially in schools, where teachers could still smoke in certain areas.

Cancer Council NT CEO Helen Smith said they were anxious to see the draft legislation. "I'm very concerned that they're looking at designated smoking areas within premises," Ms Smith said.

"There should be no smoking in any serviced area, so those workers who chose not to smoke aren't exposed to second-hand smoke."

*Northern Territory, 7/4/09, p4*

### **Nutrition: Cereal offenders sweets as doughnut**

Some breakfast cereals bowled up to kids have more sugar content than iced doughnuts and about the same amount of salt as potato chips.

An investigation into popular children's cereals also reveals families risk being fooled by some brands highlighting supposed nutritional benefits.

Products with bad fibre, fat, sugar and salt levels tend to boast the longest list of added vitamins and minerals on labels, the inquiry found.

Leading nutritionist Dr Rosemary Stanton warned cereals pumper with too much sugar and salt were giving kids an early sweet tooth and helping create a time bomb for high blood pressure later in life.

Australian Food and Grocery Council CEO Kate Carnell said parents buying cereals knew exactly what they were getting because all of the products were clearly labelled.

*Herald Sun, 6/4/09, p9; Adelaide Advertiser, 6/4/09, p11; Hobart Mercury, 6/4/09, p3; Daily Telegraph, 6/4/09, p3; Courier Mail, 6/4/09, p10*

### **Risk: Growing research links brain tumours to heavy mobile phone use**

A growing body of research is revealing a link between mobile phone use and brain tumours, prompting calls to comprehensively warn users of potential risks.

Canberra neurosurgeon Vini Khurana has published a paper examining peer-reviewed, long-term population studies conducted to date on mobile phone use and brain tumours on the side of the head.

The review finds heavy mobile phone use over at least 10 years can double the risk of getting a brain tumour on one side of the head.

But the executive director of the Australian Centre for Radiofrequency Bioeffects Research, Professor Rodney Croft, said there was no proof mobile phones could cause cancer.

Professor Croft said the population studies had a number of limitations, such as relying on subjects reporting their mobile phone use.

The review is published in the international journal *Surgical Neurology*.

The authors conclude there is adequate epidemiological evidence to suggest a link between mobile phone use over at least 10 years and the development of a brain tumour on the same side of the head as that preferred for mobile phone use.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the new study showed there was at least preliminary evidence that there was a problem with mobile phone use after 10 years.

"I think while we're waiting to see if that evidence strengthens, we could take prudent precautions. I don't think you always have to wait, particularly if it's a serious matter like developing brain tumours, until every last bit of data is in," Professor Olver said.

*Canberra Times, 4/4/09, p3*

#### **Risk: Study links scans with cancer**

Hospital patients are being put at greater risk of developing cancer because of a big rise in the use of CT scans, a new study says.

Research carried out at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital found dangerously high doses of radiation were routinely being administered to patients because of the way CT scans and X-rays are ordered.

The study uncovered a 27% increase in the use of CT scans between 2004 and 2007; and a 22% increase in 2006-2007.

The study is to be published this month in the *Internal Medicine Journal*.

Lead researcher Maryann Street said the rise in the number of scans coincided with the introduction of a new machine that is quicker and is more accurate.

Ms Street said the study recommended the introduction of a centralised system for storing images, which could be accessed by doctors at all hospitals.

*Sunday Herald Sun, 5/4/09, p23*

#### **Skin: TV ads turn off youths' urge to tan**

Graphic advertisements that show the "dark side" of the iconic bronzed Aussie male have been effective in encouraging young people to slip, slop, slap, the NSW Government says.

A Cancer Institute of NSW survey of 1000 teens and young adults aged from 13 to 44 showed six out of 10 had upped their sun protection regimen or intended to be more sun smart after seeing the Dark Side of Tanning ads on billboards and TV.

A similar proportion of respondents said they would be less likely to try and get a tan after seeing the graphic animation of a melanoma spreading through the body of a young man playing football in the park with his mates.

*Sun Herald, 5/4/09, p28*

#### **Tobacco: Cigarette displays banned at shops**

Drivers will face on-the-spot fines of \$250 for smoking in a car with a child passenger under tough new anti-smoking regulations to be introduced in July.

Cigarettes will no longer be allowed to be displayed behind shop counters and smokers will be barred from earning reward points from cigarette purchases.

But those tobacconists generating at least 80% of their turnover from tobacco-related sales have been given time to adjust to the new display ban, with some businesses allowed to phase it in over three years.

The long-anticipated regulations come almost one year since the State Government first flagged new moves to crack down on sales of tobacco.

Assistant Health Minister (Cancer) Jodi McKay said the new out-of-sight tobacco control legislation would reduce the exposure of cigarette products to children and to smokers who were trying to quit the habit.

Cancer Council NSW CEO Dr Andrew Penman said that Australia would become a world leader in tobacco control following the introduction of the Government's new laws.

*Sunday Telegraph, 5/4/09, p7; Canberra Times, 6/4/09, p5; Daily Telegraph, 6/4/09, p13*

#### **Tobacco: Smoking law 'short of puff'**

Smokers could be fined \$2000 for puffing near a street hotdog vendor or sitting on a park bench under proposed anti-smoking laws, warns a prominent WA lawyer.

WA Criminal Law Association president Richard Utting said the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Bill 2008 – due to be debated on Tuesday – too broadly defined outdoor eating areas when trying to ban smoking in them.

The Bill, which Mr Utting and the WA Local Government Association called “unworkable”, defined the areas as “a public place, or part of a public place, that is provided as an area where food or drink may be consumed, whether or not on a commercial basis”.

Mr Utting said, “To have any sense at all, the definition has got to be narrowed down.”

*Sunday Times, 5/4/09, p9*

#### **Tobacco: Secret smokes party for VIPs**

A lavish VIP party to promote cigarettes will be held this week in a building owned by the State Government, which funds anti-smoking campaigns.

The top secret, invitation-only event staged by cigarette brand Peter Stuyvesant is being held on Tuesday night at the Queen’s Theatre, a non-smoking venue belonging to the History Trust of SA.

Information about the party has been scarce since invitations went out last month and invited guests have been unwilling to talk about the top-secret event.

Senator Nick Xenophon described the cigarette industry as “parasitic” and urged the Government to cancel the event.

Cancer Council SA CEO Associate Professor Brenda Wilson said “we are disappointed that despite the overwhelming evidence of the connection between smoking and lung cancer, cigarette companies continue to promote this addictive habit”.

*Sunday Mail Adelaide, 5/4/09, p15*

#### **Tobacco: Backlash expected over Royal Show smoke ban**

Farmers’ groups have described the ban on smoking at the Perth Royal Show this year as draconian and they expect industry backlash over the ambitious policy.

As part of a new sponsorship deal between the Royal Agricultural Society and Healthway, smoking will be banned at the Claremont Showground and even outside the gates at the annual show.

WAFarmers president Mike Norton said yesterday he expected some rumblings over the policy, which he described as “an interesting decision” and “perhaps a little draconian”.

Healthway has said that anyone lighting up would be asked to stop and those who continued to smoke would be asked to leave or sent to smoke in a service road patrolled by security guards.

Australian Council on Smoking and Health president Mike Daube said the initiative was in line with modern trends and recognised that any exposure to smoke was harmful.

*West Australian, 6/4/09, p11*

#### **Tobacco: New York fumes over anti-smoking ad**

A provocative anti-smoking TV ad made by Quit Victoria has unleashed furious debate in New York over how far health authorities should be allowed to go in fighting lung cancer.

The ad features a four-year-old boy who becomes scared and starts crying when separated from his mother at a crowded railway station. The boy is seen in a distressed state for more than 15 seconds.

Aimed at smokers with children, the voiceover on the ad says, “If this is how your child feels after losing you for a minute, just imagine if they lost you for life”.

Quit’s media manager Edwina Pearse said her organisation was delighted by the New York reaction. “If people are talking about the ad, it will be cutting through to smokers.”

*Australian, 6/4/09, p5*

#### **Treatment: Hope for mesothelioma victims**

Mesothelioma sufferers have been given hope by a planned human trial after a study recorded an 80% cure rate of the disease in mice.

Professor Anna Nowak, a medical oncologist at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, said the results provided hope to sufferers of the disease, predominantly caused by exposure to asbestos.

Professor Nowak gave a summary of the tests on mice to the annual meeting of the Asbestos Diseases Society yesterday and said she expected many sufferers of mesothelioma would want to be involved in the clinical trial.

Professor Nowak said some of the most exciting results coming from the laboratory had involved treating mesothelioma mice with “routine chemotherapy” as well as the immune targeting agent CP-870,893.

She said it was the first time the drug had been used in Australia and the first time worldwide that the intravenous agent had been used to treat mesothelioma.

The human trial, which is before the hospital's ethics committee, could start in three to six months.

She said the drug was given intravenously and if the trial went ahead she would look for 12 to 15 patients to take part.

"Professor Nowak said while the trial was not expected to be as successful in humans as it had been in mice, it was providing exciting results for the world-first use of the drug to treat the debilitating illness.

*West Australian, 6/4/09, p15*

### **Nutrition: Busted for drink claims**

Coca-Cola has admitted "myth-busting" ads which claimed its drinks did not "make you fat", "rot your teeth" or were not "packed with caffeine" were false and misleading.

The controversial testimonials starring Australian actress Kerry Armstrong extolling the virtues of Coke caused a furore with parent and health groups after they were published in October last year.

Despite a formal complaint from the Australian Dental Association (ADA), the ads escaped the axe and were later approved by the advertising watchdog.

But the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has forced the soft drink company to publish full-page corrections in national newspapers this weekend.

Cancer Council NSW nutrition program manager Kathy Chapman said the marketing tactic was "objectionable" at a time when one in four NSW children was overweight or obese. She said the ads had aimed to make parents feel less guilty about giving their children the drink. ACCC chairman Graeme Samuels found "Coke's messages were totally unacceptable, creating an impression which is likely to mislead that Coca-Cola cannot contribute to weight gain, obesity and tooth decay".

*Daily Telegraph, 3/4/09, p20; Sydney Morning Herald, 3/4/09, p3; Herald Sun, 3/4/09, p11; West Australian, 3/4/09, p5*

### **Detection: Little value in breast X-rays: cancer study**

A new study has cast doubts on the widely promoted life-saving benefits of mammograms, saying routine breast X-rays barely raise women's odds of cancer survival.

The US study, published by *BioMed Central*, found almost 3000 women had to be screened to save one life and less than 5% of women with detectable breast cancers had their lives saved by regular mammograms.

Australian health experts yesterday urged women not to abandon the free health check, saying that although individual benefits might be small, breast X-rays were the best tool to pick up early cancers and the only technique proven to save lives.

Researchers led by the University of Nebraska said that while it was not wrong to promote the X-rays, women and their doctors needed better information about the benefits of being screened so they could make an informed choice.

They said many women appeared to overestimate the true benefit of mammograms, given that in more than 95% of cases they did not save the lives of women with detectable breast cancers. This had to be weighed against the known downside, including false positives and the cost of the program.

Leading WA breast cancer surgeon Christobel Saunders said that while it was true the absolute benefit to individual women was not great, at a population level the program had helped bring big improvements in the management of breast cancer.

*West Australian, 2/4/09, p5*

### **Detection: Fears on Pap tests**

Young women are being discouraged from undergoing Pap tests until later in life, at the same time as figures reveal more than 3 million are screened annually for cervical cancer.

The rate of women having a regular two-year Pap test has peaked at its highest level in 10 years.

But experts are concerned at US claims that young women do not need Pap tests if they have had the human papilloma virus vaccine.

Figures released yesterday reveal more than 61% of women had their two-year test in 2006-07.

But more women are delaying, with 74% screening only every three years and 86% every five years.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Cancer Monitoring Unit's Alison Budd said: "Higher participation means more pre-cancerous abnormalities can be detected and managed before they become cervical cancer."

In *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, US researchers say anyone under 25 and vaccinated can delay having Pap tests – which flies in the face of what Australian doctors advise.

Cancer Council NSW sexual health expert Dr Kendra Sundquist said every sexually active woman should be undergoing a Pap test from age 18.

*Daily Telegraph, 2/4/09, p13*

#### **Detection: Cervical screening test**

South Australia rates above the national average for the number of women undertaking cervical screening tests, new research has found. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study also found SA women aged between 55-59 most heeded the preventative message, with 71.9% being screened in 2006/07.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 2/4/09, p15*

#### **Support: Calling on God**

Almost 80% of people with advanced cancer rely on religion to cope with their illness, according to a study of 345 cancer patients published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Religious people are more likely to seek aggressive medical care to try to prolong life. There is a view that prolongation could provide time for divine healing or a miracle.

The study showed religious people were less likely to understand a 'do not resuscitate' order and to believe such orders were morally wrong.

While the authors suggest aggressive intervention isn't always the best option, and that faith may be denying some of them the chance of a good death, some patients have a notion of collaborating with God to overcome illness and achieve positive transformation through suffering.

*Australian Financial Review, 2/4/09, p58*

#### **Tobacco: Widow wins \$115m after long fight with tobacco giant**

For 10 years Mayola Williams has been waging a legal battle against one of the world's largest tobacco corporations, seeking justice for her husband, who died from lung cancer in 1997.

As a result of the firm's aggressive tactics, the case was brought before the US Supreme Court three times. But in the third and final hearing on Monday, the court ruled effectively in her favour.

The will of the original jury that heard Mrs Williams present the case of her deceased husband, Jesse, back in 1999 will now stand. It found that Jesse himself and Phillip Morris, the makers of Marlboro cigarettes, had been equally liable for his death.

It awarded punitive damages of \$US79.5 million against Phillip Morris – a record sum at that time. That figure has now risen to \$US145 million with interest.

Of that, Mrs Williams stands to be paid \$US58 million, with the rest going to a fund for crime victims in the family's home state of Oregon.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 2/4/09, p11*

#### **Tobacco: SIDS link to smoking**

Babies born to mothers who smoke find it harder to rouse from sleep, say Australian researchers who have probed the link between cigarettes and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

The Melbourne-based study found babies in homes where the mother smoked up to 20 cigarettes daily, during and after the pregnancy, performed poorer on arousal tests.

Associate Professor Rosemary Horne said the research shed new light on why smoking was emerging as a leading SIDS cause.

*Age, 2/4/09, p8*

#### **Treatment: Fish good oil on cancer**

Omega-3 fatty acid found in fish oil could become a powerful new weapon in the fight against cancer, after researchers found it could kill cancer cells while balancing out the toxic side effects of chemotherapy.

Its anti-cancer effect, so far proved in a study of rats, adds to apparent heart, brain and eye benefits.

Results published in the journal *Cell Division* show that the omega-3 docosahexanoic acid, or DHA, reduced the size of breast tumours in rats while limiting the side effect of cisplatin, a chemotherapy drug known to cause kidney damage.

The team of scientists from Mansoura University, in Egypt, said fish oil seemed to reduce harmful free radicals and inflammation in the body.

*West Australian, 2/4/09, p5*

### **Support: Increase in young caring for parents**

Growing numbers of young Victorians are needing help to care for a parent battling cancer. And some carers under 25 are being forced out of work or study to look after a dying or disabled mum or dad.

About 300 carers aged from 10 to their mid-20s have called on Cancer Council Victoria for advice and support in the past 12 months, an increase on previous years.

Some young people feel let down by the system, which focuses largely on aged carers, according to Cancer Council Victoria.

Carers Victoria, the state-wide peak body for carers, has made submissions to the Federal Government calling for changes to the eligibility criteria for the \$596 fortnightly carer payment. To qualify, a young carer of a sick parent cannot work, study or travel for more than 25 hours a week, which led to some dropping out of employment and education, Carers Victoria policy advisor Ben Ilsley said.

Cancer Council Victoria Cancer Services coordinator Trish Waters said children taking responsibility for a cancer-stricken parent could struggle at school and feel guilty about having a social life.

"We are seeing an increase in calls to the helpline because many years ago some people would not necessarily associate themselves with being a carer; now there is increased awareness," Ms Waters said.

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