

## **CANCER IN THE NEWS DECEMBER 2008**

### **Skin: Tans 'sexy' but so risky**

The perception that Australia is a sunburnt country is proving dangerously true among Generation Z. A survey has shown young people still consider a person with a tan to be more sexually attractive, fit and typically Australian than their pale friends.

The Queensland Institute of Technology's study of 12-to-20-year-olds found untanned people were considered 'intelligent, but uncool', as well as uptight, unhealthy and shy.

The researchers called for skin cancer safety campaigns to focus on the negative aspects of those who tanned, such as labelling them "image-conscious".

*Herald Sun, 23/12/08, p16*

### **Tobacco: Anti-smoking lobby wants plain packets**

Plain cigarette packaging is set to be the next battleground for anti-smoking groups, after they won another series of victories yesterday.

VicHealth chief executive Todd Harper said anti-smoking groups would lobby the Federal Government next year to legislate for plain cigarette packaging, which would show nothing but a large graphic health warning and the name of the brand.

The State Government yesterday announced bans on smoking in cars containing children and in schoolyards. Retailers will also have to put cigarettes in a cupboard or under the counter, announced only by a plain sign and a price board.

Mr Harper said packaging would be the next focus. "The packet is where the tobacco industry positions a lot of the image and attributes that they want to appeal to existing and new smokers," he said.

Under Victoria's tobacco control strategy, a record \$22 million in advertising will ensure that every month Victorians will see at least four anti-smoking ads.

The strategy also boosts services to help high-risk groups such as pregnant women to quit. It aims to reduce adult smoking rates by 20% by 2013.

Health Minister Daniel Andrews defended a more than two-year reprieve he has given retailers before the cigarette display ban would be enforced.

*Age, 23/12/08, p3*

### **Detection: Screened baby free of cancer mutation**

An unborn baby that has been genetically screened to be free of an inherited form of breast cancer is due to be born "imminently" in London. The pregnancy is the result of an embryo screening technique that has never been previously applied in Britain, to prevent parents passing on the disease to their offspring.

If the couple had conceived naturally and the baby had inherited the altered version of the gene BRCA1, it would have had an 80% chance of developing breast cancer and a 60% chance of ovarian cancer.

By screening embryos during in-vitro fertilisation, doctors could be sure the child would be free of the mutation.

Paul Serhal, of University College Hospital in London, who carried out the screening, said the technique offered hope for families who had suffered repeated cases of inherited breast cancer.

The screening technique used by Dr Serhal – called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis – involves creating embryos using IVF, then removing a cell from each of them when they have divided to give eight cells.

*Canberra Times, 22/12/08, p1; Sunday Times, 21/12/08, p49*

### **Public health: Boomers a burden on health**

Baby boomers are proving costly on our health system by driving up cancer rates and taxes. Generations X and Y could be paying taxes 40% higher than they are now by the 2040s to fund retirees, according to the author of a new report.

At the same time, new figures reveal the ageing population is behind an annual increase of 3000 cancer cases.

A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states cancer already has a major impact on the health system and looks set to continue due to the ageing population.

Dr Mark Short, of the institute's Health Registers and Cancer Monitoring Unit, said "Australia's ageing population is driving an increase in the number of cancer diagnoses, hospital encounters and cancer deaths."

*Daily Telegraph, 20/12/08, p18; Sunday Times, 21/12/08, p45*

#### **Research: Anti-disease centre named after Banton**

A \$2.5 million Bernie Banton Centre of Research Excellence into Asbestos Related Disease, and the Bernie Banton Asbestos Research Fellowship, will be created in memory of Mr Banton, who died a year ago today from mesothelioma.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said, "The Centre of Research Excellence will be able to spearhead important research in this area, and will contribute to the development of treatment options for asbestos-related diseases.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 22/12/08, p8; Canberra Times, 22/12/08, p5; Australian, 22/12/08, p5; West Australia, 22/12/08, p14*

#### **Skin: Rise in UK melanoma deaths**

Britain has passed Australia in the number of annual malignant melanoma deaths with the British love for cheap package holidays causing an alarming rise in the deadly skin cancer. Since the 1960s, Britons have escaped the drizzle and lack of sun in their home country for low-cost airline holidays to Spain, Italy and Greece.

But figures released by Cancer Research UK show the popularity of the holidays has contributed to a massive rise in skin cancers. More than 9500 people in the UK a year are now being diagnosed with malignant melanomas with 1800 people dying from the disease. Another 500 Britons die each year from other forms of skin cancer.

While Australia has a higher rate of melanoma, the death rate is lower, at about 1300 people a year, due to earlier detection and sun smart campaigns.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 22/12/08, p34; Hobart Mercury, 22/12/08, p19; Herald Sun, 20/12/08, p21; Courier Mail, 20/12/08, p52*

#### **Skin: Tough tanning line (NSW)**

Tanning salons will be banned from giving people more than one treatment every two days under tough new State Government rules to tackle skin cancer.

Anyone under the age of 18 will also be prohibited from using a solarium, as will people with fair skin.

Customers will also have to give written consent confirming they understand the dangers of sun lamps and there will be warning signs on the equipment. Businesses will be fined up to \$11,000 if they do not comply.

The moves are part of draft regulations to be released by the Government today for public comment.

*Daily Telegraph, 22/12/08, p15*

#### **Tobacco: Bowel cancer warning for smokers**

People who smoke may need to be screened for bowel cancer at an earlier age than non-smokers, doctors have warned, after research found that cigarette use increased the risk of the disease by almost one-fifth.

While smoking has been firmly linked with lung cancer for many years, until now it has been unclear if tobacco use increases the risk of bowel cancer. But an Italian review based on 40,000 cases of bowel cancer found an 18% increased risk in smokers.

Writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers from the European Institute of Oncology in Milan said the risk of bowel cancer also increased as people smoked more cigarettes a day and over a longer period of time.

"Our findings provide strong evidence of the detrimental effect of cigarette smoking on the development of benign tumour polyps and colorectal cancer," they wrote.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said that while it would be difficult for the screening program to identify smokers and treat them differently, the link between smoking and bowel cancer was another reason for people not to smoke.

*West Australian, 22/12/08, p11*

#### **Tobacco: Ads urge: quit now**

A new anti-smoking campaign, advising there will never be a perfect time to quit smoking, will hit TV screens in NSW today. Coinciding with New Year resolutions, the ad shows a very ill father saying "I quit every year – I was sure I was going to stop before it did me any serious damage."

The NSW Government's Best Intentions campaign will offer support services to help smokers quit.

*Sunday Telegraph, 21/12/08, p15*

#### **Tobacco: Tobacco push stubbed out**

Cigarette giant Imperial Tobacco has dramatically pulled its products from Adelaide fashion stores after the brazen tactic to ensnare young smokers was exposed.

In what has been labelled a "grovelling backdown", the tobacco company announced it would have all cigarettes out of boutiques by January 31.

It also denied that its own promotional material suggested smoking was safe and cool.

*Sunday Mail Adelaide, 21/12/08, p2*

#### **Tobacco: Government tipped to ban tobacco displays in shops**

The State Government is expected to ban cigarette retail displays in its Tobacco Control Strategy, due for release today. The Tobacco Control Strategy is aimed at cutting the number of Victorian smokers by 20%.

The centrepiece of the strategy will be a ban on smoking in cars carrying children aged under 16.

Restrictions on where cigarettes can be displayed in shops, pubs and cafes and where they can be sold at outdoor events are also expected to be included.

*Sunday Herald Sun, 21/12/08, p23; Age, 22/12/08, p3*

#### **Treatment: Stem cell cancer hope**

Adelaide scientists are working on a potential cure for one of the world's deadliest cancers – acute myeloid leukemia. The breakthrough discovery – developed at the Hanson Institute – involves an antibody that targets leukemia stem cells left after chemotherapy.

The cancerous cells divide and cause the cancer to spread once the chemotherapy has finished.

The research was financed through the volunteer-based Peter Nelson Leukemia Research Fund and the drugs will be developed through medical company CSL. Clinical trials are under way but there is no date on when the treatment will be available in hospitals.

Researcher Dr Hayley Ramshaw said the results so far were very encouraging.

Antibodies have been given to about 20 patients with advanced-stage leukemia, with one – a 22 year old man – leukemia-free after just three doses.

*Sunday Mail Adelaide, 21/12/08, p20; Sunday Times, 21/12/08, p7; Sunday Herald Sun, 21/12/08, p6*

#### **Treatment: Health chief staying put despite bungles**

Health Department chief Tony Sherbon has moved to quash doubts about his future after three cancer treatment bungles this year politically embarrassed the Government.

Senior medical sources yesterday said there was widespread talk within the health system that Dr Sherbon would soon be leaving his position.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 20/12/08, p13*

#### **Treatment: A window into cancer research**

A breakthrough technique that allows researchers to see breast cancer cells in real time as they move about in a mouse may hold the key to the development of microenvironment-specific cancer drugs.

The study, by scientists at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine's Gruss Lipper Biophotonics Center in New York, examined metastasis, the process where cancer cells migrate from the original tumour to other parts of the body.

To see the process the researchers inserted a small glass "window" into the breast tumour of the mouse and marked the cells in the tumour with a green fluorescent protein.

They then bathed two small groups of cells in a blue laser, "photo-switching" the green fluorescence to red. The researchers tracked the two red photo-switched cancer cell populations as they grew and moved about in reaction to their microenvironments.

The study was presented at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Society of Cell Biology in San Francisco on Monday.

*Sunday Canberra Times, 21/12/08, p20*

#### **Treatment: Time running out as cancer drug sits on the shelf**

A row between a drug company and the federal government over a bowel cancer drug has thrown into relief the fine distinction between cost effectiveness and cost containment and when it is ok to spend up big on extending a life and when it is not.

Roche Australia has warned that Australia might miss out on allocations of a drug, Avastin, because of the federal government's delay in processing its application to be listed on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, which provides a subsidy.

The company says it proved Avastin can prolong the life of bowel cancer patients to the satisfaction of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee in the first half of the calendar year.

Cancer Council Australia warns that the cost effectiveness of a medication is rarely a clear cut issue, particularly when it comes to cancer drugs that may cost the government between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per patient per year.

"There are always questions about what is the next drug a government should fund," CEO Professor Ian Olver said. "Avastin would deliver an incremental advantage and that has to be weighed against other innovative drugs."

"The Finance Department cannot recommend funding for a drug if it does not have the money and, in the current climate, I could understand the problems it may be having."

*Australian Financial Review, 22/12/08, p3*

#### **Detection: Call for more bowel tests**

The Cancer Council has urged the Federal Government to extend its "half-baked" national bowel screening program, saying 80 more lives could be saved each week.

The call comes with the release today of a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which reviewed cancer rates across the country, as well as the progress of the screening program.

While colorectal cancer rates are falling slightly, it is still the second most common cancer diagnosed in the country, behind prostate cancer. It is also the second highest killer after lung cancer.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program began in August 2006. More than 1 million people were invited to take part, and as at June 30 2008, 390,905 had taken up the opportunity.

However Cancer Council Australia says the test only covers people aged 50, 55 and 65 and contains no funding for recommended re-screening every two years. Cancer Council CEO Professor Ian Olver said the program should be extended to everyone aged 50, which could save 80 lives a week.

A spokesman for Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the screening program was being phased in gradually to ensure health services were able to meet increased demand.

*Age, 19/12/08, p7*

#### **Public health: Cancer number up 3000 a year**

The number of cancer victims diagnosed in Australia is expected to grow by more than 3000 cases a year by 2010. New cases this year are estimated to total more than 108,000 when figures are compiled for 2008.

A report, to be released today, will predict a significant rise in the incidence of cancer in coming years. The number of new cases is expected to grow by 3090 cases a year up to 2010.

Prostate cancer cases are expected to grow by the greatest amount, with an estimated 930 extra cases each year.

This is followed by a further 392 cases of melanoma each year, 319 cases of colorectal cancer, a further 314 men and women diagnosed with breast cancer and 190 extra cases of lung cancer.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare predicts there will be more than 42,000 deaths from cancer in 2008 – with this number estimated to rise by more than 800 deaths per year.

AIHW spokesman Christine Sturrock said the number of new cancer cases diagnosed in Australia each year passed the 100,000 mark for the first time in 2005.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 19/12/08, p9; Hobart Mercury, 19/12/08, p13*

### **Research: Taboo cancer lack funds: researcher**

Lung and bowel cancers got about 70% less research money than breast and prostate cancers and leukaemia last year, despite having equal or higher death rates because they have "less public sympathy" or are "socially taboo", a leading WA cancer researcher says. National Health and Medical Research Council figures show the Federal Government last year allocated less than \$3.3 million to fight lung cancer, which accounts for almost 20% of all cancer deaths and almost 10% of cancer diagnoses.

This is almost 80% fewer research dollars than breast cancer (\$15.5 million), 75% less than leukaemia (\$13.1 million) and 62% less than prostate cancer (\$8.3 million).

Bowel cancer, which makes up 13% of all cancer deaths and 14.5% of cancer cases, received \$6.7 million last year.

WA Cancer Council director of education and research Terry Slevin said lung and bowel cancers deserved as much research funding as breast and prostate cancers and leukaemia because they were equally if not more deadly.

*West Australian, 19/12/08, p18*

### **Tobacco: Lung cancer big killer of women**

Australia cancer experts want the Federal Government to step up its anti-smoking efforts, including more taxes, after a national review found deaths from smoking in women were rapidly overtaking those from breast cancer. An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report found lung cancer deaths in women just topped those of breast cancer in 2005 but the gap was projected to widen by 2010.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said 3277 Australian women were expected to die from lung cancer in 2010 compared with 2930 deaths from breast cancer.

"Over a 10-year period, this equals a major increase in lung cancer deaths in Australian women. While primary prevention is limited in breast cancer, we know that almost all lung cancer deaths are caused by smoking."

Professor Olver said the Rudd Government had promised to step up efforts to reduce smoking-related deaths in Australia and the new data showed the need to adopt recommendations to reduce tobacco consumption through price controls and social marketing.

*West Australian, 19/12/08, p18; Herald Sun, 19/12/08, p32; Canberra Times, 19/12/08, p3; Sydney Morning Herald, 19/12/08, p7; Courier Mail, 19/12/08, p10; Daily Telegraph, 19/12/08, p9*

### **Treatment: Third chemo drug bungle hits city**

Nine terminally ill people received smaller doses of chemotherapy drugs than they should have been given, in the third blunder involving public cancer services in Adelaide.

The patients, two of whom have since died, received up to 12% less chemotherapy than was prescribed.

South Australian Health Minister John Hill yesterday blamed the mistake on a private pharmacy that failed to check the doses supplied by drug distributor Baxter Healthcare.

A spokeswoman for Hospital Pharmacy Services, which ordered the drugs, yesterday accepted responsibility and apologised to the patients and the public hospitals involved – Lyell McEwen and Modbury – in Adelaide's north.

However, the incident compounded embarrassment over two other highly publicised cancer treatment errors in Adelaide public hospitals exposed over the past five months.

*Australian, 19/12/08, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 19/12/08, p1*

### **Alcohol: Drinkers taper their tippie**

Drinkers are starting to rein in their habit for the sake of their health. Although one in five people binge drink once a month or more, half of all recent drinkers are trying to drink less, mostly for health reasons.

And while one in six Australians smoke every day, almost one third of them have cut their intake of cigarettes. These are the findings of an analysis from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released today.

The detailed report stemmed from a 2007 survey of 23,000 people aged over 14.

*Courier Mail, 18/12/08, p28*

**Detection: New pap test women can take themselves**

The 40% of women too scared or embarrassed to undergo pap tests may be encouraged by a new, less invasive procedure to detect the virus that causes cervical cancer.

The \$50 Tam-Pap test involved a self-administered tampon, used under the supervision of a doctor who then sends it to a pathology lab for testing. If the tampon test shows a woman is carrying the HPV that causes cervical cancer, she will be referred on for a pap smear.

The pap smear is covered by Medicare rebates but the Tam-Pap test is not.

The company said the aim is for women to buy the test at a chemist and do it in their own homes, as is allowed in some other countries.

Australia's medicines watchdog has made it a condition of sale that it be done under medical supervision.

*Daily Telegraph, 18/12/08, p3*

**Prevention: Cervical cancer vaccine 'for men'**

A Nobel laureate, who discovered the virus that caused cervical cancer, has hailed Australia's efforts to vaccinate women against the disease and believes the program should be extended to men.

Professor Harald zur Hausen, from the German Cancer Research Centre in Heidelberg, shared the 2008 Nobel prize in physiology or medicine.

"You're the front-runners in Australia," Professor zur Hausen said. "I think there is even some data now becoming available that it is as effective in males as females."

*Canberra Times, 18/12/08, p13*

**Prevention: Women rush to GPs for free cancer vaccine**

Young women are swamping Australian GPs for a free cervical cancer vaccine, with early figures showing that with six months of the Government-funded vaccination program still to go almost two-thirds of eligible women have had the shot.

Experts say the figure exceeds expectations because young women have to be highly motivated to go to their doctor for the three-dose course of Gardasil which is given over six months.

CSL spokeswoman Rachel David said "For this particular age group, the uptake is quite high because even if there's been a real panic about a disease such as meningococcal or measles you still only get 10-20% of young people taking the step to go into a GP."

She said that, contrary to previous advice that women had to complete their three doses by June 30, provided they had started the course by that time, they would be included in the funded program.

*West Australian, 18/12/08, p19*

**Risk: Cancer hope in hormone therapy**

At last, some good news for women worried about using hormone therapy to reduce the hot flushes, mood swings and other symptoms of menopause: the supplements reduce death from breast cancer.

The unexpected finding comes from a team led by epidemiologist Sarah Marshall of the University of California, Irvine, and counters worrisome research indicating that hormone replacement therapy increases the overall risk of breast cancer.

"Use of these hormones appears to be a benefit in terms of protecting against risk of cancer death," said Ms Marshall, who presented the results at this week's 31<sup>st</sup> San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium in Texas.

"This may allow women who have used hormones and who are worried about future breast cancer risk, or even their prognosis if they currently have cancer, to breathe a little easier."

Professor Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia and a medical oncologist agreed: "It's surprising but it's good news for women who've been taking HRT."

Ms Marshall and her colleagues analysed breast cancer deaths in the continuing 100,000-plus California Teachers Study. They followed 2783 post-menopausal women using HRT who developed breast cancer after joining the study in 1995-96, tracking them until death or the end of 2005.

The team found that compared to non-HRT users, women using estrogen and progestin had a 63% reduced relative risk of dying from their cancer, while women on estrogen alone cut their risk by 30%.

*Australian, 18/12/08, p3*

**Support: Prostate woes linked to pay**

How much men earn seems to affect how they fare with prostate cancer, with research showing those on low incomes are more likely to be diagnosed with advanced disease. A University of California Los Angeles study of 570 men on low income and no private health insurance found that 19% had prostate cancer which had spread, compared with 4% of men in the general population.

But diagnosis rates for lower risk and less advanced prostate cancer were not higher in the low-income group. In contrast, high-income earners had significantly higher rates of early cancers.

Doctors said the results suggested that men on tight budgets were less likely to seek diagnosis and treatment early.

*West Australia, 18/12/08, p14*

**Tobacco: Teen smoking leads to obesity**

Teenage girls who smoke more than double their chance of becoming obese in adulthood, according to a study hailed by Australia's Quit organisation as a myth-buster.

The research also found girls who smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day in their teens went on to have waists measuring about 3.5cm larger than non-smokers when they reached their 20s.

Victoria-based Quit Support Programs manager Luke Atkin said the finding was important as many young women still drew a favourable association between smoking and thinness – despite the dire health warnings.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 18/12/08, p27*

**Treatment: Patients die waiting**

More than 350 bowel cancer patients are dying while the Rudd Government delays subsidising a new drug that could extend their lives.

Six months ago, the Government's chief medicine advisory body recommended the breakthrough new anti-cancer drug Avastin be subsidised. But bowel cancer patients are still waiting for federal Cabinet to approve the decision.

*Daily Telegraph, 18/12/08, p2*

**Detection: Drive to slash cancer curse (VIC)**

An extra 20,000 women will be offered breast screening in a multi-million-dollar Brumby Government program. A 10% increase in screening will take the number of people tested to 220,000 a year.

The state also plans to enhance research and step up screening for bowel and cervical cancer. The measures are part of the Government's goal of increasing cancer survival rates by a further 10% by 2015.

The Government is expected to set aside \$24 million for extra screening and \$12 million is expected to be spent on breast cancer research.

*Herald Sun, 17/12/08, p13*

**Tobacco: 'Light' smokers allowed to sue (International)**

In a ruling that could pave the way to huge lawsuits against tobacco companies, the top US court has said smokers can sue over the allegedly deceptive marketing of "light" cigarettes. The case involves three residents from Maine who puffed on Marlboro Lights and Cambridge Lights for 15 years. They argued they had a right under state law to sue the companies for allegedly deceiving smokers into believing that light and low-tar cigarettes were healthier.

Altria Group, which makes Marlboro Lights, countered that the lawsuit was pre-empted by federal law and interfered with the regulatory authority of the US Federal Trade Commission. The company argued the FTC had failed to act despite being aware that light cigarettes were no less a health hazard than regular cigarettes.

But the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, yesterday upheld an earlier ruling from the First Circuit Court, which had said the main legal issue was not about health hazards, but the duty under Maine law not to deceive consumers who had bought the light cigarettes.

The ruling does not guarantee that the three Maine residents will prevail in their lawsuit, but it does allow the case to proceed in the federal courts.

*Australian, 17/12/08, p8*

**Treatment: Cancer breakthrough**

Adelaide scientists from the Royal Adelaide Hospital's Hanson Institute and the University of SA's Wark Institute have found a way to get minute particles to travel to tumours. The new nanotechnology technique will help determine the success of therapy on cancer patients. Associate Professor Michael Brown from the Hanson Institute said it usually took doctors up to nine weeks to determine whether treatments were working. "However, through the use of this nanotechnology we may be able to determine whether a treatment is having an effect within just a few days," he said.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 17/12/08, p7*

**Detection: Concerns over clinic's breast cancer tests**

Health and consumer groups are concerned about an alternative breast cancer screening service being offered in WA which they warn could mislead women by suggesting it can help detect the disease.

The Health Consumers Council and Cancer Council WA are worried that women could forgo the conventional but sometimes painful screening mammography in favour of unproved techniques which measure electrical activity and temperature in breast tissue.

Based at a Mosman Park medical centre, Breast Check uses infra-red thermal imaging to check for changes in breast tissue which it says can occur in the early stages of breast cancer.

The clinic also uses a portable device to measure electrical resistance in the breasts to distinguish between normal and cancerous tissue. It advertises 15-minute non-invasive breast checks which can be carried out in naturopath clinics, workplaces and private homes.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said there was no evidence to support electrical impedance scanning or thermography as a viable means of breast cancer screening. He said their marketing was playing on the accepted discomfort associated with mammograms.

Breast Check chief executive officer Jo Firth said the service was not promoted as a replacement for the government-funded BreastScreen program which all eligible women were still strongly encouraged to use. But it gave women, particularly young women who were not eligible, information about changes in their breasts that could be an early warning sign.

*West Australian, 13/12/08, p17*

**Public health: Health checks coming to work**

Workplace weigh-ins, medical checks, healthy canteens and lunch-time workouts will be funded by the federal Government under a plan to keep Australia's employees healthy and boost productivity.

The Rudd Government will pay for health and exercise programs in workplaces across the country to lower rates of diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease and to boost productivity.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the Commonwealth could provide health checks, office nurses and physical education programs.

"Employers might put forward proposals which are about funding staff, for example a work-based nurse and there isn't a reason why we mightn't provide money to do that," she said.

*Sunday Telegraph, 14/12/08, p15; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 14/12/08, p7*

**Risk: Hormone therapy can double risk of breast cancer**

Taking menopause hormones for five years doubles the risk for breast cancer, according to a new analysis of a US federal study that reveals the most dramatic evidence yet of the dangers of the popular pills.

Even women who took estrogen and progestin pills for as little as a couple of years had a greater chance of contracting cancer. And when they stopped taking them, the odds of their avoiding the disease quickly improved, returning to a normal risk level about two years after quitting.

These new findings are likely to end any doubt that the risks of hormone treatment outweigh the benefits for most women.

The study results, released at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium, are from the Women's Health Initiative, which tested estrogen and progestin pills that doctors long

believed would prevent heart disease, bone loss and many other problems in women after menopause.

The main part of the study was stopped in 2002 when researchers found surprisingly higher risks of heart problems and breast cancer in hormone users.

Researchers saw a clear trend in the tests: risk rose with the start of use, peaked when the study ended and fell as nearly all hormone users stopped taking their pills. At the peak, the breast cancer risk for pill takers was twice that of the others.

*Australian, 15/12/08, p10; Courier Mail, 15/12/08, p16; Herald Sun, 15/12/08, p18; West Australian, 15/12/08, p13*

### **Skin: Deadly ray fear**

An investigation by consumer group Choice has found that shade structures in childcare centres potentially compromise children's safety.

Choice said yesterday the design and installation of sun shades in preschools should be regulated.

Seven childcare centres were audited in Australia and none complied fully with regulations governing UV protection levels of shade cloth.

"Responsibility for shade falls across different organisations whose resources are already too stretched to adequately police policies for childcare centres", Choice spokesman Christopher Zinn said.

However, Cancer Council Australia skin cancer committee chairman Craig Sinclair said parents were also responsible for their child's skin protection. "The design of a shade structure is incredibly important and what we find is a lot of childcare centres build shade structures, but fail to take into account the direction of the sun," he said.

"The other important aspect is making sure that the shade cloth is going to provide the right level of protection. But in saying all that, even if they do put proper shade around school equipment it is still important for kids to be adequately protected with clothing and sunscreen because there is going to still be a lot of reflective UV coming through and around the sides...Certainly there needs to be a commitment that schools provide adequate shade, but more importantly there needs to be appropriate sun-smart policies and practices."

*Herald Sun, 15/12/08, p13; Adelaide Advertiser, 15/12/08, p3; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 14/12/08, p20; Sunday Telegraph, 14/12/08, p17*

### **Skin: High schools 'could be sued' over sunburnt kids**

Students up to year 12 could be forced to wear hats on campus under a new push to curb soaring skin cancer rates and prevent schools being sued by pupils who develop the disease. The head of the Victorian Principals Association says schools are receiving complaints from parents whose children were sunburnt at school events where shade options were limited.

"We live in an increasingly litigious society and I would not be surprised if a student ends up with skin cancer later in life and decides the school was insufficient in its duty of care and they sue the school or the principal, or both," Mr Ackerman said. "It's in the school's interests to have in place very practical measures like compulsory wearing of hats, provision on shade and encouraging sunscreen use."

The push is backed by the Cancer Council, VicHealth and leading dermatologists.

*Sunday Age, 14/12/08, p6*

### **Tobacco: Cigs firm in fashion ploy**

A tobacco company's push to sell cigarettes in fashion stores has been denounced as a "cynical" marketing ploy aimed at recruiting a new generation of smokers, sparking calls for a nationwide examination of cigarette retailing laws.

Anti-smoking advocates are outraged that financial incentives have been offered to fashion retailers to stock the Peter Stuyvesant brand in several high-end stores.

At least six Adelaide outlets, among them a hair salon, have reportedly been identified as stocking Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said the tobacco industry's entry into Adelaide fashion stores was the first time she had heard of such a move in the country. "It's a blatant strategy to recruit young people into smoking because they know, when you consider one out of every two long-term smokers die, you have to constantly recruit new smokers," she said.

Senator Nick Xenophon said he would approach federal and state health ministers to develop a uniform approach to laws on cigarette marketing.

*Australian, 15/12/08, p3; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 14/12/08, p1*

### **Tobacco: Smoking shock for Aborigines**

Smoking rates among Aboriginal Victorians are almost twice as bad as the State Government thought, it will admit in its tobacco control strategy, due before Christmas.

Almost 40% of Aboriginal mothers in Victoria reported that they smoked in the month prior to birth. In order to start addressing the problem, the Government will give \$400,000 to Victorian Aboriginal health centres to help persuade pregnant indigenous women to stop smoking, and provide nutrition and financial support.

Smoking is the leading avoidable cause of the health gap between Aboriginal people and the rest of Australia.

Led by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, it will establish pilot sites that will find out what works and prove its effectiveness so it can be rolled out across the state.

Fiona Sharkie, executive director of Quit, has welcomed the plan, which her organisation will help fund.

*Age, 13/12/08, p8*

### **Physical activity: An hour's walk a day can halve breast cancer risk**

Walking for just an hour a day can more than halve a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. Women who walk regularly and take further gentle exercise for at least an hour a week are 55% less likely to have a tumour than those who never work out.

The finding backs earlier studies that suggest even gentle exercise is crucial in helping to prevent the disease.

The latest study, by Nagoya City University in Japan, tracked 30,000 women over 12 years to monitor their lifestyle habits and risk of cancer.

The results, published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, found that those who walked at least an hour a day, and then went jogging, swimming or to the gym for another hour once a week, were substantially less likely to have cancer.

Higher-risk women, such as those who are overweight or post-menopausal, benefited just as much from daily strolls as those at lower risk, they said.

*Herald Sun, 12/12/08, p31*

### **Tobacco: South Perth set to ban smoking in alfresco dining areas**

South Perth cafes and restaurants could soon be completely smoke-free with the local council set to become the latest municipality to ban smoking in alfresco dining areas.

A report to the South Perth City Council recommends that it endorse the ban on health grounds. The council will decide next Tuesday.

*West Australian, 12/12/08, p41*

### **Public health: Cancer set to be world's biggest killer**

Cancer will surpass heart disease as the world's No. 1 killer by 2010, with poorer countries set to suffer most due to smoking, high-fat diets and other factors, international health experts warn.

About 12 million cancer cases will be diagnosed this year and more than seven million will die from the disease, according to a World Health Organisation report.

A projected 38% population increase in less developed countries between now and 2030 was identified among several demographic changes underlying the trend.

The report estimates that 20-26 million cancer diagnoses will be made in 2030, and 13-17 million cancer-related deaths.

"The rapid increase in the global cancer burden represents a real challenge for health systems worldwide," said Peter Boyle, director of WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The global cancer burden is also rising because of Western lifestyles being adopted in developing countries, primarily smoking, high-fat diets and less physical activity.

Leading global cancer organisations met this week in Atlanta in the US where they called for an immediate ratification of an international tobacco-control treaty and asking the US to comprehensively regulate tobacco use and invest in cancer vaccines and research.

*Herald Sun, 11/12/08, p34*

### **Tobacco: Health workers push smoking**

Health workers contribute to the high rates of smoking among people with mental illnesses by using it as a behavioural tool and justifying the habit as their “only comfort”, a damning new report has found, as NSW Health considers whether to ban smoking in all psychiatric facilities next year.

The report, *Smoke and Mirrors*, was commissioned by Cancer Council NSW, and shows there is a “deep-rooted smoking culture” among mental health staff and patients, and little support for the mentally ill to quit the habit.

The misconceptions that people with psychiatric disorders smoke to self-medicate or relieve symptoms and anxiety “are too easily used as excuses to justify inaction about smoking,” said the head of Cancer Council NSW Andrew Penman.

“We know workers use provision of tobacco as a way of behaviour control or reward, or it’s used to bond or develop relationships with patients, but that’s an inappropriate tool and it’s dangerous for patients because it jeopardises their health.”

NSW Health has proposed legislation to make psychiatric facilities and surrounds – indoors and surrounds – smoke-free. A taskforce will report on the proposal early next year.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 11/12/08, p8*

### **Tobacco: Packets push new horizons**

In the latest marketing ploy by tobacco companies, cigarette packets are being rebranded, using images of beaches, kangaroos and Australian flora to entice smokers.

Cashing in on the hype of the *Australia* film, tourists entering Sydney airport duty free stores are greeted by stands of Horizon cigarette cartons emblazoned with a photograph of a kangaroo and an Australian landscape.

Anti-smoking groups are outraged by the cunning stunt and it has reignited their campaign for plain packaging.

NSW Cancer Institute’s chief Cancer officer Professor Jim Bishop said packaging advertising was the only way cigarettes could be promoted. “It is the last bastion for cigarette companies to advertise,” he said.

Rebranding of packets by the tobacco giants is not new but companies have justified their resistance to neutral packaging, saying it is too expensive and will take years to develop.

“It weakens their argument as to why they can’t change their packets when we ask for plain packaging,” said Cancer Council NSW’s tobacco control manager Wendy Oakes.

Imperial Tobacco Australia, manufacturers of Horizon, defended the use of the kangaroo, saying it had “nothing to do with the film *Australia*”.

*Daily Telegraph, 11/12/08, p15*

### **Tobacco: Calls to start smoking ban (NT)**

Anti-smoking group Smokefree Australia has called on smoking to be banned in all Territory pubs and clubs. The NT government has given pubs and clubs until January 2, 2010 to ban smoking, but Smokefree coordinator Stafford Saunders said the ban should begin immediately.

*Northern Territory News, 11/12/08, p9*

### **Treatment: Drug industry calls for PBS guarantee**

Medicines Australia chairman Will Delaat drew on his personal battle with cancer as he warned the Federal Government not to cut funding for the pharmaceutical benefits scheme.

Mr Delaat told the National Press Club yesterday that cuts to the scheme were a “false economy” which would leave already struggling state healthcare systems in strife.

Medicines Australia, the pharmaceutical industry body, wants the Government to leave the \$7 billion scheme untouched as the economic crisis forces Treasury to look for savings.

*Canberra Times, 11/12/08, p13*

### **Detection: Cancer test company in global drive**

The company behind a self-administered test for human papillomavirus is hoping to raise up to \$10 million as part of an initial public offering to take the product global.

Cellscren Direct’s Tam-Pap test allows women to collect a sample that can be tested for HPV, the virus that causes most cases of cervical cancer. The test was approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration in June last year.

The company said the test was designed as a “complementary weapon” in the fight against cervical cancer, alongside the CSL-developed Gardasil vaccine and the pap smear test. By allowing the sample to be taken at home, the company hopes to overcome the hurdles cited by 52% of women in its survey, who said they found the experience of getting a pap smear degrading, unpleasant or painful.

*Age, 10/12/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 10/12/08, p79; Adelaide Advertiser, 10/12/08, p54*

#### **Environment: Government ‘lied’ on asbestos compo laws (SA)**

Senator Nick Xenophon says the State Government lied when it claimed to have been waiting “months” for draft regulations on asbestos compensation laws two years ago.

Documents obtained by Mr Xenophon through Freedom of Information laws show the Attorney-General’s department sent a draft submission on asbestos law changes to parliamentary council on December 13, 2006.

Council received the document just three days after a spokesman for Attorney-General Michael Atkinson publicly claimed the Government had been waiting “months” for those changes to be drafted.

Independent John Darley – a leading figure in the fight for victim’s rights – said it was disgraceful that 1105 days had passed since the Government introduced the Dust Diseases Act.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 10/12/08, p6*

#### **Environment: Asbestos coup plot**

Widows of asbestos victims are in uproar over a bid by a Sydney businessman to take control of a foundation established to distribute compensation.

The Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia – set up to manage the James Hardie compensation fund – is expected to descend into chaos when it meets to elect a new board today.

Sydney businessman Peter O’Connell, owner of Metro Asbestos Encapsulators, is at the centre of a battle with claims he brought in 85 new members this week ahead of the election.

*Daily Telegraph, 10/12/08, p21*

#### **Prevention: Vitamins no help in cancer battle**

There is no evidence that antioxidant supplements such as vitamins C and E and selenium reduce the risk of cancer, an investigation has found.

While some experts have argued the antioxidants offered a “wave of hope” in the battle against cancer, US researchers say the combined results of two studies involving more than 50,000 middle-aged and older men found no evidence that they prevented cancer.

In the first study, 35,000 men taking part in a trial to determine whether vitamin E and selenium prevented prostate cancer were told to stop taking the supplements because they did not work and could even increase the risk of cancer and diabetes.

In the second study of 15,000 male doctors, Boston University researchers found that despite earlier research that suggested vitamin C and E reduced the risk of certain cancers, neither supplement had a significant effect on prostate cancer or reduced the risk of bowel, lung, bladder or pancreatic cancers.

University of Illinois researcher Peter Gann said doctors should not recommend antioxidant supplements to men to prevent prostate cancer.

*West Australian, 10/12/08, p11*

#### **Tobacco: Smoking ban costs clubs \$1.7m a day (NSW)**

The introduction of the indoor smoking ban last year cost clubs and pubs almost \$1.7 million a day in poker machine revenue, cutting thousands of jobs in the industry and putting at risk future donations to charities and sporting groups.

Poker machine revenue for pubs and clubs plummeted \$616 million last financial year compared with the 12 months before the smoking ban, according to figures from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing.

When these losses are added to Star City Casino’s 12% decline in poker machine revenue, the impact of the smoking ban on the state’s gaming industry hits about \$900 million.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 10/12/08, p1*

#### **Treatment: Monash aims to tame danger enzyme**

Since Elizabeth Blackburn discovered the enzyme telomerase, which boosts a cancer cell's ability to divide and multiply, the race has been on to find ways to fight it.

Now women with cervical and breast cancer may benefit from newly published research showing bone morphogenetic protein-7 can inhibit the "danger" enzyme. About 85% of all cancer require telomerase to continue spreading.

Monash University immunologists Jun-Ping Liu says 18 months of work on mice, testing various proteins, have identified BMP-7 as the one that not only can halt cancer growth but halve the size of tumours within a week.

"Telomerase enhances stemcell development in foetuses, and we wondered how it could be good in fetal development and bad in cancer," Liu says.

"So we thought in fetal development there must be an inhibiting mechanism to prevent cancer development. A further clue was that once the fetus had developed, BMP-7 wasn't present any more."

Liu says it will take about three years before the treatment can be tested in clinical trials with women.

*Australian, 10/12/08, p32*

### **Detection: New test for ovarian cancer now even more accurate, says developer**

The world's first test which looks for "fingerprints" of deadly ovarian cancer while the disease is in its early stages has been made even more accurate, according to its Australian inventors.

Known as OvPlex, the original test was developed in Melbourne and shown to be 92% accurate in picking up key proteins which point to the presence of ovarian cancer cells. It was launched last month and will become available from GP surgeries around the country over the next few months.

The \$200 blood test will not be offered as a screening test for all women. It will be used by GPs as a diagnostic test for those suspected of having the disease.

An initial trial using 107 ovarian tissue samples, including 46 with cancer cells, showed it is 98% accurate.

The company said the refined test should detect the disease at an earlier more treatable stage and differentiate between cancer tumour types for more personalised treatments.

It is planning a bigger trial of the new test on 350 cancer samples from several European and Asian countries. Following that, it will seek to manufacture and market the test by late next year.

*West Australian, 9/12/08, p5*

### **Detection: Robbed of mum**

The death of champion marathon runner Kerryn McCann has stunned a nation and prompted warnings that young women need to be vigilant against aggressive breast cancers.

McCann, who died overnight on Sunday, was just 40 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer last year. The dual Commonwealth Games gold medallist leaves behind a husband, and three young children.

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre director Dr Helen Zorbas said McCann had found a lump in her breast but waited months before doing anything about it. McCann delayed chemotherapy because she was six months' pregnant with her third child.

Dr Zorbas warned younger women to be alert to the dangers because while breast cancer was rarer in women aged under 50, it was often a more aggressive form.

Cancer Council South Australia chief executive Associate Professor Brenda Wilson said early detection was the key to survival. "It is vital that all women are breast aware, and get to know the look and feel of their breasts...if any changes do occur they should contact their doctors immediately," she said.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 9/12/08, p1; Australian, 9/12/08, p3; Courier Mail, 9/12/08, p5; Herald Sun, 9/12/08, p4; Canberra Times, 9/12/08, p1; Age, 9/12/08, p1*

### **Obesity: Slow eating may cut cancer risk**

Teaching children to savour their food could help combat cancer. A study of British youngsters showed that the faster children eat, the fatter they are.

As obesity raises the risk of at least five forms of cancer, something as simple as teaching children to eat slowly could have a huge impact on public health.

The study by Cancer Research UK's health behaviour research centre also suggested that genes influence our eating rates more than upbringing.  
The research is published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.  
*Hobart Mercury*, 9/12/08, p5

### **Tobacco: Young leading the way as Australia gives up smoking**

Latest tobacco figures show smoking rates among young people have halved in the past two decades. Just one in five Australians now smoke and 18 to 24 year olds are leading the resistance, with 19% addicted compared with 47% in 1980.

The fall has been seen in both men and women and across all age groups, including secondary school smokers, and reflects an increasing national intolerance for smoking. Deaths from lung cancer also continue to fall for men and have levelled out among women. But smoking rates among Aboriginals remain high.

Releasing the *Tobacco in Australia* report yesterday, Professor Mike Daube, chairman of the Federal Government Tobacco Working Group, said the general decline in smoking was an exceptional public health success.

"It has achieved remarkable gains in lung cancer and other diseases, but we will not achieve the further changes we need if tobacco control activity is sporadic," Professor Daube warned. Fiona Sharkie, executive director of anti-smoking group Quit, said the new smoke-free legislation appeared to have driven the fall.

*West Australian*, 9/12/08, p16; *Herald Sun*, 9/12/08, p19; *Canberra Times*, 9/12/08, p3; *Courier Mail*, 9/12/08, p17; *Age*, 9/12/08, p5; *Hobart Mercury*, 9/12/08, p14; *Daily Telegraph*, 9/12/08, p3

### **Treatment: Health chief defends delay (SA)**

Health Department chief executive Tony Sherbon has defended the decision not to initiate a major review after the first two "cancer bungles" this year.

Dr Sherbon told a budget and finance committee yesterday that it was "somewhat of a leap" to conclude that every cancer treatment system in the state should have been checked after the mistake came to light.

Health Minister John Hill has now ordered a review of all procedures for ensuring the settings of cancer equipment across the state.

*Adelaide Advertiser*, 9/12/08, p4

### **Detection: Breast compo claim**

A Mackay woman who claims she had an unnecessary operation to remove lymph nodes after being incorrectly told she had breast cancer, is suing for compensation.

The operation to remove 11 lymph nodes went ahead despite a pathologist advising against it because a biopsy did not reveal any cancer, the claim alleges.

Jacqueline Hampson was 48 at the time she had the operation in 2006. She says she was told a year later she had never had cancer.

Her claim against MacKay Health Service District, filed by Shine Lawyers, says that medical staff failed to properly diagnose or investigate her condition or perform surgery in an appropriate manner.

Mrs Hampson had a mammogram at BreastScreen Queensland's Mackay clinic in 2005. It revealed a cluster of micro-calcifications in Mrs Hampson's breast and she underwent a core biopsy.

She says BreastScreen Queensland told her the biopsy revealed an infiltrating ductal carcinoma – a form of breast cancer.

But a pathologist who later reviewed the biopsy told the hospital that there was no cancer and advised against performing a lymph node operation, the claim says.

*Sunday Mail Brisbane*, 7/12/08, p30

### **Environment: NSW's disease hot spots**

Where you live is strongly related to your risk of developing serious diseases, including cancer, heart disease and diabetes, a NSW Health study has revealed.

According to Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant's annual report, the State has disease hot spots where residents have significantly higher rates of sickness, obesity and suicide than average.

These include the north coast, where both men and women are much more likely to contract most types of cancer than are people in other parts of the State.

Dr Chant said geography was important because it related to risk factors like wealth, education, lifestyle habits and access to health services.

"Many of the cancers have particular underlying risk factors that would drive them – such as higher smoking rates for lung cancer," she said.

"Colorectal cancer would have a diet component and melanomas would be related to sun exposure."

*Sunday Telegraph, 7/12/08, p29*

### **Nutrition: Web of tricks snares young**

Some of Australia's top food manufacturers have been exposed for using underhand tactics to trick children into revealing personal information over the internet.

Experts warn that companies including Uncle Tobys, Coca-Cola, Kelloggs and Nestle are exploiting the web to reach young consumers because it is unregulated.

Many use promises of games and free gifts to solicit valuable marketing details such as a full name, address, date of birth and mobile phone number.

Professor Sandra Jones, director of the University of Wollongong's centre for health initiatives, said she was astounded by the sophistication of tricks used to get information from children.

Her new research, which was commissioned by Cancer Council Australia, uncovered widespread breaches of World Health Organisation guidelines that forbid companies from encouraging children to buy products by mail or the internet.

"The most alarming thing was the amount of personal information these companies collect about children," Professor Jones said.

She said the companies' TV and print advertising were monitored, but their web-based activities escaped scrutiny.

*Sunday Telegraph, 7/12/08, p28*

### **Public health: Men get breast cancer as well**

The number of men diagnosed with breast cancer has more than doubled in the past 20 years, prompting calls for greater awareness.

Figures from the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre show that 109 men were diagnosed with the disease in 2004, up from 43 in 1983. In 2001 the figure was 95.

The centre's Julie Thompson said researchers cannot explain the increase, but with an average age of diagnosis for males at 66, longer life spans could be a factor.

While men account for fewer than 1 in 100 cases, there were 729 men known to be living with the disease in 2002. One in five men diagnosed with the disease die within the first five years of diagnosis.

*Sun Herald, 7/12/08, p50*

### **Support: Cancer is not the hardest to say**

A survey of oncologists and palliative care specialists shows the hardest thing to tell a patient is not necessarily that they have cancer.

In the survey, published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, of more than 150 doctors, 13% said they had "a lot" of difficulty raising the issue of non-PBS-subsidised medication they know a cancer sufferer cannot afford.

"Communicating with patients has been identified as a significant source of stress for these doctors..." University of Sydney professor Martin Tattersall said.

On the question of how difficult it was to tell someone they had cancer, 68% of doctors said "not at all". Other difficult areas included telling someone their cancer had returned or a treatment had failed.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 8/12/08, p12*

### **Treatment: Roos can be link to cures**

Australian marsupials may hold the key to curing a range of diseases from cancer to a common sexually transmitted infection.

Researchers have mapped the genetic code of kangaroos for the first time and have discovered they have similarities with humans.

Professor Jenny Graves, director of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Kangaroo Genomics, believes information can be applied to human beings and other marsupials.

Further research may reveal how to stop cancer developing, improved ways of treating transplant patients, and how to halt the alarming spread of chlamydia.

Having mapped the genetic code of the kangaroo, Professor Graves and her team intend to apply their findings to research into the Tasmanian devil and what causes the devastating devil facial tumour disease.

This is an infectious cancer threatening the survival of the Tasmanian devil. Research into the disease may not only save the devil from extinction but it might also show how cancer is formed in human beings.

*Sunday Age, 7/12/08, p14*

#### **Treatment: Cancer drug 'worsened' the disease**

A main drug treatment for breast cancer for more than 20 years has been found to make the disease worse in some patients by boosting a chemical which makes cancer cells more active.

Tests by British researchers reported in the journal *Breast Cancer Research* found that instead of killing cancer cells, tamoxifen could make them more aggressive in a small group of women with low levels of the protein E-cadherin.

Despite tamoxifen being seen as the gold standard in breast cancer treatment for many years, recent studies have found newer drugs such as aromatase inhibitors are often better. It was unclear how many women had low E-cadherin but it was likely to be a minority.

*West Australian, 5/12/08, p17*

#### **Prevention: Follow-up clears cancer vaccine**

Australia's breakthrough cancer vaccine has been given the all-clear in a follow-up study of schoolgirls who fell ill after being injected with Gardasil.

The study took in 25 young women who were reported to immunisation authorities as suffering from a "suspected hyper-sensitivity" reaction during the national roll-out of the cervical cancer vaccine.

After a range of skin-prick and injection tests, only one young woman went on to develop a case of possibly unrelated hives when re-exposed to the vaccine.

"Only three of the 25 evaluated schoolgirls had probable hypersensitivity to the quadrivalent human papilloma virus vaccine after 380,000 doses had been administered in schools," the research paper, published in the *British Medical Journal*, also concludes.

"Our data suggest that true hypersensitivity to the...vaccine is uncommon and that suspected hypersensitivity reactions such as urticaria (hives) are often idiosyncratic."

The study was conducted by Sharon Choo, attached to the Department of Allergy and Immunology at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, and colleagues.

*Australian, 4/12/08, p8; Herald Sun, 4/12/08, p2; Adelaide Advertiser, 4/12/08, p5*

#### **Skin: Teens risking cancer**

A \$1 million Queensland Government advertising campaign to highlight the "dark side" of tanning began last night.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson said skin cancer was one of the state's most difficult health challenges as one in 20 Queenslanders were expected to be diagnosed with melanoma before the age of 75.

*Courier Mail, 4/12/08, p19*

#### **Treatment: Eleven cancer kids in chemo overdose**

Eleven children, including at least one baby, have been overdosed with a powerful chemotherapy drug in a hospital bungle that will intensify concern about cancer services in Adelaide.

The treatment blunders between 2005 and October, yesterday forced the South Australian Government to order an audit of all medical equipment in public and private hospitals used in cancer programs.

One of the overdosed children, who were aged one to 15 years, has since died but state Health Minister John Hill insisted this was unrelated to the errors made at Adelaide's Women and Children's Hospital.

The overdosed children received between 9 and 17% too much chemotherapy with the drug etoposide phosphate, because of a collapse of "corporate knowledge" in the Women's and Children's Hospital's oncology unit, Professor Marcus Vowels had found.

The problem was traced back to a computer program that was used to recalculate chemotherapy doses after the hospital switched from the more side-effect prone drug etoposide.

*Australian, 4/12/08, p6; Adelaide Advertiser, 4/12/08, p1*

#### **Treatment: Cancer claim breached Act**

The Brisbane-based makers of fruit punches claimed to cure cancer were yesterday slapped with a \$15,000 bond for a "technical breach" under Queensland's "confusing" Food Act.

The owners of Dr Red Nutraceuticals pleaded guilty in the Brisbane Magistrate's Court to one count of publishing beneficial "health claims" on their company website that their punches cured a list of life-threatening illnesses, including prostate cancer.

Lawyers for Dr Red argued that although the company committed a "technical breach" of the Queensland Food Act 2006, it had complied with advice from Queensland Health in order to comply with all existing laws.

However, barrister Andrew Preston, for Queensland Health, said Dr Red had complied with advice given by QH in 2005, but then altered information on its website saying scientific testing had proved its products could assist in cure or treatment of serious illnesses and disease.

*Courier Mail, 4/12/08, p16*

#### **Nutrition: No gag on junk food ads: Senate**

Labor and Coalition senators have co-operated again to block attempts to rein in promotion of three big triggers of ills in the community – gambling, alcohol and junk food.

The Senate's Community Affairs Committee majority has knocked back proposed legislation to curb junk food advertising, despite appeals from health groups but in the face of intense lobbying from the food and advertising industries.

The chairwoman of the committee, Labor's Claire Moore, said the committee believed it was "premature" to bring forward legislative changes to food and beverage advertising while the national obesity strategy was being developed.

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance said that studies had shown between 48% and 81% of all food advertisements were for "unhealthy foods".

Greens Bob Brown and Rachel Siewert dissented from the majority report declaring: "We disagree with the committee's rose-tinted view that self-regulation will do for now."

*Sydney Morning Herald, 3/12/08, p2; Adelaide Advertiser, 3/12/08, p33*

#### **Skin: Low vitamin D 'a risk'**

An international study has called for a major trial into the benefits of giving people vitamin D supplements after finding evidence that low levels of the vitamin in the blood may increase the risk of bowel and breast cancer.

The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer says its review shows low vitamin D increases the risk of cancer and harmless tumours in the bowel, while there is limited evidence of a link with breast cancer risk.

*West Australian, 3/12/08, p55*

#### **Research: Blitz on leukemia**

Melbourne researchers are coordinating a global survey of a million mothers and babies to try to find the cause of leukemia.

The world-first study involving scientists and researchers at Murdoch Childrens Research Institute aims to find any preventable causes of the cancer.

The study, which involves more than a million mothers and babies from 15 countries including China, Japan, the US, Norway, Denmark and England, is expected to produce results in about five years.

MCRI director Prof Terry Dwyer said the global study was one of the most promising opportunities to find a preventable cause of leukemia.

*Herald Sun, 2/12/08, 17*

**Tobacco: Smokers' drug alarm**

The drugs regulator has renewed warnings about the smoking cessation drug Champix, after more than 300 reports of adverse reactions, including suicidal thoughts.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration's latest adverse drug reactions bulletin said symptoms including depression, aggression, abnormal dreams, insomnia, hallucinations and anger had been associated with the drug, known as varenicline.

*Courier Mail, 2/12/08, p10*

**Treatment: Cancer treatment pioneer 'restricted' by court case**

A doctor who created a liver cancer treatment is being prevented from developing his cancer research while he fights a legal battle over a contract that restricts him from further research. Dr Bruce Gray is seeking to have a restraint clause in his shareholder agreement with Sirtex Medical, the medical research company of which he was a founding director and major shareholder, declared void.

Dr Gray's lawyer Martin Bennett yesterday told the court the clause, entered into in 1997, prevented Dr Gray from carrying on, being concerned in or interested in any business similar to or competitive with any part of Sirtex for a period of three years after he ceased being a shareholder of the company.

It is understood he is being prevented from doing further cancer research while the court case continues.

*West Australian, 2/12/08, p15*

**Skin: Confusion over safe sun time**

Many Australians believe potentially harmful levels of sun exposure are required to prevent vitamin D deficiency, according to new data.

Research presented at the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia 2008 Annual Scientific Meeting, found almost a third of respondents believe fair-skinned adults require at least 30 minutes of sun per day to maintain vitamin D levels.

Nearly 32% also believed children needed a similar amount of sun exposure.

The findings have led experts to say 'sun smart' messages emphasising a balance between sun protection and prevention of vitamin D deficiency may need to be updated.

*Medical Observer, 28/11/08, p6*

**Support: Fertility after cancer**

More than 50% of breast cancer patients and parents of children with cancer have no recollection of health professionals discussing their future fertility, an expert says.

Timing was vital in attempting to preserve fertility in cancer patients, said Professor Martha Hickey, professor of gynaecology from the University of Western Australia, but doctors must also be realistic about the chances of cancer patients having children.

A fertility treatment decision aid developed by the University of NSW for women with cancer is due for release next year, she said.

*Australian Doctor, 28/11/08, p4*

**Treatment: No mood for cancer**

Interventions designed to improve mood, coping skills and health behaviours can help improve outcomes when used in addition to anti-tumour medications in breast cancer, according to a trial of 227 patients who had been treated for regional breast cancer.

Researchers followed the patients for an average of 11 years, showing that patients randomised to the intervention groups had 45% lower risk of recurrence compared to controls; mortality rates were reduced by 56%.

The research is published online in *Cancer*.

*Australian Doctor, 28/11/08, p17*

*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.*