

## **CANCER IN THE NEWS FEBRUARY 2009**

### **Public health: world body deems third of cancer is preventable**

WA would see a dramatic drop in cancer rates - as many as 3300 cases a year - if people adopted basic lifestyle measures such as staying a healthy weight and exercising, according to a major international report released last night.

According to the World Cancer Research Fund report released in London, a third of cancer cases are preventable through healthy eating, increased physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight and reducing alcohol consumption.

The report found more than 40% of all colon cancer and breast cancers could be avoided in developed countries.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said it was the most authoritative advice yet on what people needed to do to cut cancer rates. He sounded an urgent warning for people to adopt a healthier lifestyle to reduce their risk.

The report recommended governments, companies and institutions like schools, health agencies, workplaces and the media have a cooperative approach to cancer prevention.

*West Australian, 27/2/09, p5*

### **Skin: strong black does wonders for skin**

Caffeine can prevent skin cancer and improve people's complexion - but drinkers would have to down hundreds of espressos to have any benefit.

Researchers from Harvard Medical School showed caffeine helps eliminate UV-damaged cells by causing them to self-destruct leading to suggestions a coffee-based sunscreen may one day be developed.

The announcement of the discovery last night has prompted a Cancer Council warning not to ditch sunscreen in favour of a cappuccino. SunSmart program manager Sue Heward welcomed the research, but warned a practical application of the findings required further study.

"We reinforce the message that it is critically important for people to protect themselves from the sun and continue to use the five SunSmart sun protection methods," she said.

*Herald Sun, 27/2/09, p7*

### **Treatment: outcomes compromised by less invasive breast surgery**

The current trend towards minimally invasive surgery for breast cancer has improved cosmetic outcomes, but could be compromising cure rates and potentially endangering lives. Experts are warning that newer techniques such as oncoplastic surgery - where removal and reconstruction of breast tissue are performed in one operation, with no use of radiation - have not yet been proven.

Professor John Boyages, executive director of the NSW Breast Cancer Institute at Westmead Hospital, Sydney, agreed. "What we've learnt over the last 25 years is that good local control saves lives."

Evidence-based therapy was to treat the whole breast, either by mastectomy and reconstruction or lumpectomy plus radiation, he said. Experimental minimalist techniques were "dabbling with danger" and caution was needed before reducing treatment, he said. Other minimalist approaches being used in Australia included localised radiation to the scar over five days rather than the whole breast for five weeks.

Professor Boyages was commenting on *BMJ* editorial by Professor Monica Marrow, chief of breast surgery at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre in New York. She warned that studies evaluating oncoplastic surgery were reporting local failure rates as high as 9% at five years. "Failure to demand a rigorous evaluation of oncological outcomes, as well as cosmetic ones, runs the risk of losing some of the gains in survival seen in the past decade," she wrote.

*Medical Observer, 27/2/09, p3*

### **Public health: funding gap fuels cancer centre fears (WA)**

WA's capacity to handle the growing number of cancer patients is threatened by the lack of a funding commitment for the next stage of the State's biggest cancer centre, lobbyists say.

The Cancer Council WA and its patient advocacy group Cancer Voices want the State Government to commit to funding stage 3 of Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital's cancer centre which they say is crucial if patients are to be offered a complete range of treatment.

There are concerns that plans to relocate Princess Margaret Hospital to the Nedlands site, at

a cost of up to \$1 billion, could delay redevelopment of SCGH, including its cancer centre. Health Minister Kim Hames confirmed this week that stage 3 was not yet funded but would be considered as part of the continuing review of the Health Department's capital works program. He said stage 2 was due to be completed by July 2011.

Cancer Council chief executive Susan Rooney said stage 3 was essential because under stage 2 the doctors' offices were not located within the cancer centre.

*West Australian, 26/2/09, p16*

### **Risk: alcohol raises cancer risk**

Even low to moderate consumption of alcohol increases a woman's risk of developing cancer and could explain nearly 13% of the cancers of the breast, liver, rectum and airways combined.

A huge new study by researchers at Oxford University that tracked more than 1.2 million women for an average of more than seven years has found that each additional alcoholic drink consumed on a daily basis led to at least 15 extra cancers per 1000 women up to the age of 75. This was a significant increase on the background risk for the six selected cancers per 1000 women.

The findings support previous evidence that alcohol intake increases cancer risk and will lend credibility to a worldwide push by public health watchdogs to stiffen warnings on alcohol intake.

Australia's own top public health body, the National Health and Medical Research Council, is expected to publish long-awaited new guidelines on alcohol intake in the coming week.

Alcohol researchers said the findings validated the NHMRC's original plan to cut the recommended maximum intake. The study was published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

*Australian, 26/2/09, p3; Sydney Morning Herald, 26/2/09, p20; Canberra Times, 26/2/09, p14*

### **Screening: concern at fall in Pap test numbers**

Women's health experts are worried by a large drop in the number of Victorian women having Pap tests.

Figures this week show that in the fourth quarter of last year, 2038 Victorian women had the cervical cancer screening test, 14% fewer than in the same quarter of 2007. The number is also 12% less than the same quarter in 2006.

"This is definitely a concern," said manager of PapScreen Victoria Kate Broun. "These figures do reflect a decrease in Pap test numbers in the second half of last year. As to the reason why, we're not too sure. We need to look at that further."

Ms Broun said one explanation could be misconceptions around the HPV vaccine. There were fears that young women having the cervical cancer vaccine might discontinue Pap tests, believing they were no longer necessary. But the figures suggest a trend across all age groups.

"It could be reasons related to access, the cost of screening, the lack of bulk billing, a whole host of reasons," Ms Broun said. "It could be as simple as the fact PapScreen did not run any TV campaigns last year. This is something women could so easily forget to do without that reminder."

Across the country, the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer has dropped on average by 5.2% each year since organised screening began in 1991.

*Age, 26/2/09, p3*

### **Treatment: tissue match in a finger prick**

Sydney scientists have developed a breakthrough tissue-typing method that could give new hope to leukaemia and organ transplant patients.

The process, in which tissue-typing would become a routine test completed when blood was taken, is being hailed as "faster, cheaper and more accurate" than the existing technology. The results would then be entered into an international register, allowing doctors to check for tissue matches for organ transplant patients.

The technology was created by NSW University's Matthew Clemson and Wallace Bridge. The university has obtained a provisional patent and is now seeking a commercial backer to ensure it is able to be utilised.

Dr Bridge told *The Daily Telegraph* the technology could help save lives by broadening the base of available tissue and organ donors and boosting the speed and accuracy of essential

tissue matching required.  
*Daily Telegraph, 26/2/09, p20*

#### **Detection: landmark trial for cancer tool**

Circadian Technologies last night signed on major private hospital operator Healthscope to test and market a breakthrough cancer diagnostic tool.

The tool, developed with the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre over four years, will help pathology laboratories identify the hidden source of secondary cancers.

The software based tool was designed to diagnose the origin of tumours that have metastasised. Known as cancers of unknown primaries or CUP, they are the fourth most common cause of cancer deaths in Australia. Circadian's tool can reduce diagnostic times for CUP cancers by months.

The technology has been tested with archival samples, but Healthscope will clinically validate it using live patients before applying for regulatory approval.

*Herald Sun, 25/2/09, p33*

#### **Tobacco control: call to legalise "snus" tobacco product in Australia**

An academics called for a controversial tobacco product available in Sweden...which has Europe's lowest rates of lung cancer...to be made legal in Australia.

The product "snus" was banned in 1991 as part of Australia's efforts to reduce avenues for the expansion of the tobacco industry...but Dr Coral Gartner says it should be overturned, Its outlawed across the European Union, but Dr Gartner says snus could help cut the human toll from tobacco addiction among people who can't quit smoking, or those who ignore health messages or opt not to.

Sweden's smoking rate dropped from 40% in 1976 to 15% in 2002, with 21% of Swedish men now daily users of snus. Despite this, Dr Gartner says the country recorded no increase in the rate of oral cancer or cardiovascular disease and tobacco-related deaths in Sweden are among the lowest in the developed world.

The Cancer Council agrees a case could be made on health grounds for introducing snus to Australia...but chief executive Professor Ian Olver also says more research is needed.

*AAP Newswire, 24/2/09*

#### **Prevention: yoghurt helps cut cancer risk**

Having a couple of serves of calcium rich dairy foods such as yoghurt each day reduces the risk of cancers such as bowel cancer, a major American study has found.

Researchers from the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, linked the dietary habits of almost 500,000 men and women with State cancer registries to investigate the role of calcium in preventing cancer.

They said men and women were generally advised to have about 1000-1300mg of calcium a day, or the equivalent of three serves of low fat dairy food, but many did not consume enough.

The study is published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

*West Australian, 24/2/09, p3*

#### **Public health: cancer rates soaring**

Cancer rates are increasing so fast they will soon be as big a problem as climate change, an expert claims. The swelling obesity epidemic will be pinpointed as a prime cause of cancer, in a policy report led by Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of epidemiology and public health at University College London.

Each year, cancer claims up to seven million lives and this is expected to climb to more than 10 million by 2010, according to the World Cancer Research Fund. And the number of people diagnosed with the condition is predicted to double, from 10 million now to around 20 million by 2020.

Marmot stressed action should be taken with the same urgency now afforded green issues. We should focus on the cancer problem because a huge percentage of fatalities could be prevented or delayed, he said.

Marmot spoke after chairing a panel of 23 world cancer experts contributing to the World Cancer Research Fund's Policy and Action for Cancer Prevention report.

As well as pushing for action from governments, industry, schools, health professionals and the media, the panel says individuals need to take responsibility for their own health and that

of their families.

*MX Sydney, 23/2/09, p12; MX Brisbane, 23/2/09, p8*

#### **Detection: prostate cancer urine test**

Researchers have made the first steps towards devising a urine test for detecting prostate cancer, according to a paper released on Wednesday by the British journal *Nature*.

A chemical fingerprint called sarcosine can be found in high levels in the urine of men with aggressive cancer of the prostate.

Concentrations of sarcosine were high in 79% of samples with metastatic prostate cancer and in 42% of the samples of early-stage cancer, the team found.

The tell-tale metabolite is a better indicator of advancing disease than a standard blood test, the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) assay, according to the research.

The discovery of sarcosine could open up new pathways for attacking the disease.

*Sunday Territorian, 22/2/09, p45*

#### **Public health: France defies its heritage to condemn alcohol**

To the anger of the wine industry and disbelief of lovers of a good drop worldwide, the French Government has told its people to stop drinking wine.

The French Health Ministry has made alcohol one of the chief villains in a drive against cancer. "The consumption of alcohol, especially wine, is discouraged," say guidelines drawn from the findings of the National Cancer Institute.

A single glass of wine a day will raise the chance of contracting cancer by up to 168%, claims the ministry's brochure. Forget those 1980s findings that antioxidants in wine were good for health, according to the French experts. "Small daily doses of alcohol are the most harmful," institute president Dominique Maraninchi said. "There is no amount, however small, which is good for you."

*Weekend Australian, 21/2/09, p3*

#### **Skin: cash slip a slap for cancer education**

Skin cancer experts say the Rudd Government must urgently commit to funding the national sun protection policy to counter mixed messages about vitamin D deficiency and educate new parents and immigrants on the dangers of ultraviolet rays.

Research released yesterday by Cancer Council Australia showed that spending just 28 cents for every Australian each year for two decades would prevent 80,000 cases of melanoma and 111,000 cases of other skin cancers.

The reports co-author, Professor Rob Carter from the Health Economics Unit at Deakin University, said the annual SunSmart campaign was one of the best public health buys available to government's yet there was no funding commitment beyond this summer.

The Cancer Council wants the Federal Government to commit to a nationwide, five-year, \$41.5 million SunSmart campaign. "Set against an annual \$290 million skin cancer medical bill, this is a strong government investment," Professor Carter said.

The report found when advertisements reminding people to "Slip, Slop, Slap" are removed, people become lax about protecting their skin against harmful UV rays. Graphic warnings such as NSW Health's recent "Dark Side of Tanning" campaign, are proven to get people wearing a hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and a shirt.

The chair of the Cancer Council's national skin cancer committee, Craig Sinclair, said the Rudd Government had not indicated it would fund a comprehensive program beyond this month. "It would be ironic if the current Labor Government, with its platform on health prevention, decides not to continue a project that was initiated by a Liberal government, who did not really invest in public health," he said.

*Sun Herald, 22/2/09, p13; Sunday Tasmanian, 22/2/09, p16; Sunday Age, 22/2/09, p10;*

*Sunday Mail Brisbane, 22/2/09, p30*

#### **Tobacco control: anti-smoking ads show diseased organs (NSW)**

Graphic images of the diseased organs of a smoker will be used in a confronting anti-smoking ad campaign to screen in NSW from tonight.

The campaign, called Cigarettes Are Eating You Alive, shows the effects of cigarettes on a smoker's internal organs using real and computer-generated images.

NSW Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), Jodi McKay, said the same campaign was used in New York with great success.

There was a 400% call increase to their quit hotline and over 240,000 US smokers have quit since its 2006 launch, Ms McKay said in a statement.  
The ad campaign is part of the government's commitment to reduce smoking-related illnesses and deaths, Ms McKay said.  
*AAP Newswire, 22/2/09*

#### **Tobacco control: tobacco 'shame' (WA)**

Tobacco companies are mocking anti-smoking laws by taking over delicatessen and newsagent signs, according to Perth MP John Hyde.  
"Delis and newsagencies are being rebranded as Tobacco Stations and Free Choice Tobacconists without any of the mandatory warnings their death-causing products have to carry," he said. "Legally, tobacco displays have to be limited to one square metre in total and carry health warnings. It's shameful that Lotterywest, which is dedicated to healthy outcomes, is promoted alongside an addictive drug that kills hundreds of West Australians every month."  
*Sunday Times, 22/2/09, p24*

#### **Treatment: first frozen egg baby**

The first "frozen egg" baby born in Australia through a revolutionary new technique is set to give single women and couples greater opportunities to have children later in life.  
The new snap-freezing technique has grown out of a demand from mainly single women who want to delay childbirth. The \$10,000 process will give women the option, for example, of freezing eggs in their early 30s then having a baby in their late 30s.  
It is also suitable for cancer patients before they undergo radiation and chemotherapy, which often damages the reproductive system.  
*Daily Telegraph, 21/2/09, p1; Herald Sun, 21/2/09, p3*

#### **Research: gene research helps tailor kids' leukaemia therapy**

Genetic research is paving the way for more tailored therapy for children with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia who fail to respond, researchers say.  
Scientists in the US have identified a range of inherited genetic variants that influence response to leukaemia drugs.  
The researchers searched nearly half a million single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) among 371 children with newly diagnosed leukaemia in two independent cohorts, finding that 102 of them affected treatment response. The finding heralds the possibility of using genetic markers to predict response to therapy.  
While leukaemia cure rates are around 80%, its not known why some children receiving their first dose of chemotherapy are left with residual malignant cells in their bone marrow.  
Most previous studies on chemotherapy response have focused on the genes of tumour cells themselves, but this study investigated inherited variants across the child's genome.  
"Although the acquired genetic characteristics of tumour cells play a critical role...our results show inherited genetic variation of the patient also affects effectiveness of...therapy," the researchers wrote.  
In the future, drug delivery could be optimised so children less likely to respond may receive more intense treatment to reduce the chance of failure. *JAMA 2009;301:393-403.*  
*Medical Observer, 13/2/09, p12*

#### **Research: HRT cancer risk less than five years**

New research is casting doubt on the five-year time frame in which the use of HRT is considered safe, prompting one expert to suggest a shorter period of use may need to be recommended to reduce the risk of breast cancer.  
Professor Henry Burger, an endocrinologist and consultant to the Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health, was commenting on a US observational study of 67,000 women.  
It found that oestrogen plus progesterone therapy was associated with a doubling of the risk of lobular cancer within three years of use. The study also found that the risk of ductal cancer doubled within 10 years of use.  
Professor Burger, who had previously advocated a five year safety limit, says the new evidence indicates that breast cancer risk may start to rise within 2-3 years of use. He says it is more important than ever to consider the type of hormone being used and the age and weight of the woman.  
Commenting for the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and

Gynaecologists, Dr Elizabeth Farrell said the findings underlined that age, weight and duration of use all influenced risk. However, HRT remained appropriate for treating healthy women when symptoms were moderate to severe, she added.

*Medical Observer, 13/2/09, p1*

#### **Tobacco control: radical action needed to curb smoking rates**

Radical smoking cessation strategies may be needed if Australia is to reduce smoking rates and meet proposed official targets by 2020.

Queensland researchers have found if current trends continue, approximately 14% of Australian adults will still be smoking in 2020. This means Australia would need to double its annual smoking cessation rate to reach a policy target of 10% by that date.

"Even if initiation continues to decline, smoking prevalence in the adult population will not drop below 10% until 2029 unless rates of cessation increase," the authors warned.

Dr Nick Zwar, professor of general practice at the University of NSW, said he would favour funding nicotine replacement therapies on the PBS for low-income earners and broadening the role of practice nurses to provide smoking cessation support with the introduction of a rebate for these activities.

The authors also advocated bans on the sale of cigarettes in supermarkets and convenience stores, restricting sales to specially licensed outlets, increasing taxation on cigarettes and enhanced public smoking bans.

*Medical Observer, 13/2/09, p7*

#### **Research: cancer care rural study (NSW)**

Cancer survivors living in rural areas could receive better care and support thanks to a \$500,000 study in the Hunter.

Newcastle University researchers are investigating how location affects the services offered to survivors of blood cancers such as leukaemia and lymphoma.

"The low incidence of blood cancer disease makes it difficult for survivors and carers to share experiences with others," Professor Rob Sanson-Fisher said. "This is especially true for survivors living in rural areas."

Cancer survivors across Australia will be interviewed to compare the different services offered in urban and rural settings.

*Daily Telegraph, 18/2/09, p21*

#### **Tobacco control: despite bans, smokers light up at hospitals, and get away with it (WA)**

More than a year after the State's hospitals became no-smoking zones, smokers are flouting the rules, with one of Perth's biggest hospitals admitting some visitors and patients who light up on its grounds get away with it.

The previous State government introduced its anti-smoking policy at all WA hospitals in January last year, but Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital has had a no-smoking policy since the start of 2007.

Health Consumers Council executive director Michele Kosky said smoking on hospital grounds was difficult to police because staff needed to be inside treating people. She suggested the Government re-think its policy and consider having a designated smoking area at all hospitals away from entrances.

A SCGH spokeswoman said the hospital had a moral duty to discourage smoking, but admitted it was powerless to stop all patients and visitors from smoking.

*West Australian, 18/2/09, p5*

#### **Tobacco control: mental hospitals in smoking row (WA)**

Mental Health Minister Graham Jacobs wants to overturn smoking bans in mental health hospitals for involuntary patients, sparking outrage from public health groups, who say the move would be retrograde and unnecessary.

Dr Jacobs said he favoured dropping the bans, which were introduced in January last year, but was seeking legal advice on the implications that could have.

"I think there is a time and a place for you to quit smoking and I don't believe when you're acutely ill from a mental health condition and involuntarily admitted to a mental health institution that that is the time," Dr Jacobs said.

Respiratory physician Stephen Stick, who is also the chairman of the committee which implemented the Smoke Free WA health system policy, said any bid to overturn smoking

bans was an "error".  
*West Australian, 18/2/09, p5*

### **Obesity: fatty sport snacks**

Canteens at children's sporting grounds are under fire for feeding the obesity epidemic by selling fatty foods to youngsters.

A NSW Cancer Council and University of Sydney survey found more than half of youngsters playing weekend sport are snacking on junk food including meat pies and hot chips during games. Parents have reported the canteens are stocked with predominantly fat-laden foods such as cakes, sausage rolls and chips.

Kathy Chapman, Cancer Council's nutritionist, accused the canteens of double standards. "Obesity is a major problem among Australian children and if you would expect one place to sell healthy food, surely it would be a community sporting ground." "It is a double standard to promote an active lifestyle and also promote fatty snacks that have no benefit to anybody, particularly children," she said.

The Cancer Council is lobbying the Government to help sporting grounds run canteens like those in schools, which sell fruit salads, wraps, popcorn and low-sat sausage rolls.

*Daily Telegraph, 14/2/09, p16*

### **Research: new cancer weapon**

French specialists unveiled a new weapon against cancer yesterday - a molecular "decoy" that mimics DNA damage and prompts cancerous cells to kill themselves.

The research, published in a US journal, *Clinical Cancer Research*, opened fresh avenues for attacking tumours that were resistant to conventional therapy, they said.

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy aim at inflicting sufficient damage to a cancer cell to unleash a process of programmed cell death, also called apoptosis.

Clinical trials could start by the end of 2010.

*Canberra Times, 16/2/09, p9; Adelaide Advertiser, 16/2/09, p29*

### **Research: obesity and diabetes linked to pancreatic cancer**

Increasing weight and a history of diabetes are both risk factors for pancreatic cancer, a study of more than one million women shows.

However, smoking was associated with the greatest relative risk of pancreatic cancer of all the factors examined, with current smokers having more than twice the risk of those who have never smoked.

Researchers also examined height, alcohol consumption and rates of physical activity but found no association between any of these factors and pancreatic cancer.

"The evidence for an association between pancreatic cancer and physical activity is mixed," the authors said. "Further examination is warranted, especially in studies with more detailed measurement of physical activity. It is possible that this association is partly due to diabetes induced by undiagnosed pancreatic cancer or precancerous conditions of the pancreas," the authors suggested.

*Australian Doctor, 13/2/09, p15*

### **Research: vitamin pills no cure for cancer or heart disease**

The largest study ever of multivitamin use in older women found the vitamins did nothing to prevent common cancers or heart disease.

The eight-year study in 161,808 postmenopausal US women echoes recent disappointing vitamin studies in men.

The study appears in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

*Sunday Territorian, 15/2/09, p44*

### **Tobacco control: quitting rates have to double**

Smoking cessation rates need to double if smoking prevalence is to drop to 10% by 2020, Australian researchers say.

If current rates of initiation and cessation continue, smoking prevalence will fall from 17% to 14% by 2020, they said. However, this falls short of the 10% prevalence recommended in a recent US Institute of Medicine report.

Modelling found that a drop in initiation rates among young people was not enough to meet the 2020 target, researchers from the University of Queensland's School of Population Health

said.

"In addition to lowering rates of instantiation, strategies are needed to increase cessation in current smokers," researchers wrote in *Tobacco Control* (online).

They suggested measures including increased mass media campaigns, promotion of quit lines and public smoking bans.

*Australian Doctor, 13/2/09, p14*

### **Public health: our lifestyle is killing us**

We're increasingly smoking, drinking and eating ourselves into the grave, experts have warned after charting an alarming rise in related cancers.

The incidence of liver cancer for women in NSW jumped 134% in the decade to 2006. For men, the incidence was up by 70%.

Similar increases were becoming evident in kidney, bladder and oesophagus cancers. The NSW Cancer Institute warned long-term survival was "grim".

Institute chief cancer officer Professor Jim Bishop said lifestyle choices - smoking, diet and excessive alcohol were to blame.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 13/2/09, p21*

### **Research: cancer research at risk**

A leading cancer research centre at the Prince of Wales Hospital is being axed due to NSW Health's budget restraints. Millions of dollars of research into prostate cancer is now at risk, following the closure of the Oncology Research Centre, based at Randwick.

A hospital spokeswoman last night confirmed negotiations were taking place with staff but would not comment further. It comes after *The Daily Telegraph* revealed last month that the hospital was planning to retrench up to 300 workers, including cancer researchers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

Andrew Giles, Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia's CEO, said the loss of the cancer researchers would be tragic. Professor Pamela Russell, head of the 25 person research team "has so much knowledge and expertise and she is one of the greatest in the world," he said. "They are closing down one of the best research centres."

A source at the Prince of Wales Hospital said the researchers were devastated by the news. "They are trying to see if other research centres can take on their research, otherwise they will have to give the grants money back."

In an official statement, the hospital spokeswoman said: "We can neither confirm or deny. We are currently speaking with staff and will make no further comment."

*Daily Telegraph, 13/2/09, p23*

### **Research: fertility drug gets all clear**

Some positive news has been fed into the long-running debate about fertility drugs and the risk of ovarian cancer. Past studies have yielded conflicting results, but now a Danish study has shown the drugs do not increase the risk.

Published in the *British Medical Journal*, the study followed more than 54,000 women with infertility problems and found no convincing association between the overall risk for ovarian cancer and use of fertility drugs, although it noted many participants had not yet reached the peak age for ovarian cancer.

An accompanying editorial says the data is reassuring, although small increases in risk cannot be ruled out.

*Australian Financial Review, 12/2/09, p62*

### **Support: rural cancer patients at home in city (WA)**

The Cancer Council yesterday opened a new accommodation facility for country cancer patients, the 26-room Milroy Lodge in Shenton Park, to ease pressure of Crawford Lodge which has had a waiting list of up to 400 people a year for the past few years.

Council president Christobel Saunders said there was a huge demand for comfortable and affordable lodgings for country cancer patients and carers.

About 20% of all new cancer cases (almost 2000 a year) are in people from country WA and most need Perth treatment.

In the past year, more than 2600 cancer patients and carers have stayed at Crawford Lodge and it is expected that Milroy Lodge will house about 1000 people a year.

*West Australian, 12/2/09, p14*

### **Treatment: battle for cancer unit (NSW)**

The fight to make public radiotherapy services available to cancer patients on the Central Coast moved up a notch after a petition was tabled in Federal Parliament.

The Central Coast arm of Cancer Voices NSW has fought for a Coast public radiotherapy unit after the region was snubbed in last year's State budget.

At present the single private radiotherapy unit for cancer patients is at Gosford and public patients must travel to Newcastle or Sydney for treatment.

Local Cancer Voices NSW spokeswoman Kathy Smith said they were overwhelmed by support: "It demonstrates the depth of feeling in the community with just about everyone having a tale of the stress and suffering of someone close to them who has had the trauma of being a cancer patient on the Central Coast."

*Daily Telegraph, 12/2/09, p25*

### **Prevention: Multivitamin pills fail test on preventing disease**

The largest study of multivitamin use in older women has found they do nothing to prevent common cancers or heart disease.

The eight-year study of 161,808 post-menopausal US women echoes recent disappointing vitamin studies in men.

Research has focused on cancer and heart disease because of evidence that diets full of vitamin-rich foods may protect against those illnesses. But that evidence does not mean pills are a good substitute.

The study's lead author, Marian Neuhouser of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Seattle, said: "Get nutrients from food. Whole foods are better than dietary supplements."

However, co-author JoAnn Manson said that despite the results, published yesterday in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, multivitamins could be useful.

The data is observational, not the most rigorous of scientific research. Dr Manson, chief of preventative medicine at Harvard's Brigham & Women's Hospital, said it was unclear whether taking vitamins might help prevent cancers that took many years to develop. She said multivitamins might still be useful "as a form of insurance" for people with poor eating habits. The study involved an analysis of data on women in their 50s and over who participated in long-running government studies on post-menopausal women.'

*Australian, 11/2/09, p12; Herald Sun, 11/2/09, p40; Canberra Times, 11/2/09, p13*

### **Risk: Assurance on IVF drug risk**

Women who use fertility drugs are no more likely to develop ovarian cancer, according to researchers, putting to rest concerns that the drugs may increase the risk by over-stimulating the ovaries.

It has been widely speculated for the past 20 years that fertility treatments including IVF may boost the risk of ovarian cancer, particularly in women who have several cycles of treatment or never fell pregnant.

Known as the "incessant ovulation" theory, the belief was that the repeated cycle of damage and repair that occurred with ovulation could lead to DNA damage and potentially cancer.

It was also believed fertility drugs might increase the risk of cancer by stimulating ovulation.

But results from a Danish study of almost 55,000 women who attended fertility clinics found there was no increased risk, even for those who had 10 cycles of treatment.

Writing in the *British Medical Journal*, scientists from the Danish Cancer Society said that while there was an increased risk for the most serious form of ovarian cancer in women who used the drug clomiphene, it was considered only a chance association.

Commenting on the results, senior research fellow at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Penelope Webb, said that while the study found fertility drugs did not increase the risk of cancer to any great extent, small increases could not be ruled out.

Another limitation of the study was that many participants had not reached the peak age for ovarian cancer so their risk still needed to be monitored.

*West Australian, 11/2/09, p50*

### **Research: Cancer project**

Researchers from Sydney's Centenary Institute have been awarded \$8 million over five years to investigate the causes and treatment of liver cancer. The institute's executive director,

Professor Matthew Vadas, said liver cancer was particularly difficult to diagnose in the early stages and treatment options were limited.  
*Sydney Morning Herald, 10/2/09, p10*

#### **Risk: Testicles at risk from marijuana**

Smoking cannabis puts men at increased risk of the most aggressive type of testicular cancer, scientists have found. Men who smoked at least once a week or who had smoked since adolescence were twice as likely to develop the disease as those who didn't use the drug, the US researchers found.

Study leader Stephen Schwartz, said more research was needed to confirm the link and show why the drug put men at risk.

"Our study is the first inkling that marijuana use may be associated with testicular cancer, and we still have a lot of unanswered questions," Dr Schwartz.

"What young men should know is that first, we know very little about the long-term health consequences of marijuana smoking, especially heavy marijuana smoking, and second, our study provides some evidence that testicular cancer could be one adverse consequence."

*Courier Mail, 10/2/09, p24*

#### **Tobacco: Public backs push for tighter smoking bans**

Most West Australians favour smoking bans in cars carrying children and at outdoor venues such as parks and beaches, according to two new surveys that will be used to lobby State MPs.

The results, which show support for anti-tobacco measures even from smokers, are contained in submissions to a Lower House inquiry starting today into Alfred Cove MP Janet Woollard's proposed smoking bans.

Dr Woollard has in-principle support for the Bill from the Labor Party and National leader Brendon Grylls, but has drawn opposition from some hospitality industry groups and Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan.

A recent Cancer Council survey of more than 400 people has found strong public backing for the anti-smoking measures, with 85% of non-smokers and 39% of smokers favouring alfresco bans while 81% of non-smokers and 33% of smokers back bans at parks and beaches.

Tobacco programs director Denise Sullivan said the council rejected claims the bans would be too difficult to police, saying experience from other jurisdictions showed they were largely self-enforcing.

"Our results show even though smokers won't necessarily welcome the changes, they see them as inevitable and they want clarity of where they can smoke so they're not in conflict with non-smokers," she said.

*West Australian, 10/2/09, p16*

#### **Detection: Lung cancer watch**

Australia's first early detection lung cancer program has begun at the Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane. Researcher Dr Henry Marshall said the project would use low radiation dose computer tomography (CT scans) to look for small nodules which might not be detected in ordinary X-rays.

"In recent years lung cancer deaths have stayed at the same level while breast and colon cancer deaths have decreased," Dr Marshall said. "This is because lung cancer is often not diagnosed until it is already in the advanced stages. We're hoping to demonstrate that CT scanning can detect lung cancer while it is still in the early stages, giving patients a better chance at recovery."

The first Australian program, funded by The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation, Queensland Smart State and the National Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases, aims to recruit 750 people this year to take part in the six-year study.

Already 32 people have volunteered for the project, with no cancers yet detected. People interested in participating should be aged between 60 and 74 years and either currently smoke or have been pack-a-day smokers for 30 years in the past.

The findings from the study will be compared with similar American and European studies to tailor future screening programs.

*Sunday Mail Brisbane, 8/2/09, p44*

#### **Detection: New diary to help save lives**

Women are being urged to keep a diary to track symptoms of ovarian cancer. The most common symptoms of ovarian cancer, which can be misdiagnosed, are pelvic and abdominal pain, increased abdominal size, urinary frequency and feeling full quickly. Women with these symptoms should consult a GP with a completed diary to show the frequency of symptoms, said Ovarian Cancer Australia chief executive Karen Livingstone.  
*Sunday Tasmanian, 8/2/09, p15*

**Obesity: Obesity crisis now hits babies**

Children as young as one are being diagnosed as obese, and a major children's hospital is treating youngsters that are twice the size they should be. Doctors at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, Sydney are admitting youngsters with severe weight-related health problems, such as sleep apnoea and diabetes. There is now a 12-month waiting period for the state's only child weight management clinic.  
*Herald Sun, 7/2/09, p9; Daily Telegraph, 7/2/09, p1*

**Research: \$13m to fight disease**

University of Adelaide researchers have been awarded almost \$13 million to investigate diseases such as pneumonia, gastroenteritis and cancer. Two research teams will share \$12.8 million in Federal Government grants announced by the National Health and Medical Research Council. Professor Angel Lopez will use \$3.7 million to investigate hormones implicated in cancer.  
*Adelaide Advertiser, 7/2/09, p50*

**Treatment: Olivia's \$50m cancer coup**

Olivia Newton-John has used her star power to secure \$50 million in government funding to build a new centre for cancer patients. Newton-John said she met federal ministers, including Families and Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin, to lobby for Commonwealth funding for the wellness centre. The facility, which will open in Melbourne in 2012, will provide spiritual and physical treatment, including meditation, relaxation and massage for cancer sufferers. Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the Federal Government would contribute \$25 million towards the centre, matched by an earlier \$25 million commitment from the Victorian Government. The new Olivia Newton-John Centre will be at Melbourne's Austin Health Hospital and would also have a research and training facility, linked to the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research in New York.  
*Sunday Mail Brisbane, 8/2/09, p35; Sunday Territorian, 8/2/09, p8; Sunday Telegraph, 8/2/09, p38; Sunday Times, 8/2/09, p21*

**Treatment: Locals fund cancer centre**

They begged the State Government for funding for cancer patients, but when their pleas were ignored, the people of Tamworth went to work. In just 15 months, they raised \$480,000 to extend Tamworth Base Hospital's oncology unit. The refurbished centre treated its first patients last week. Fund-raising committee chairwoman Anne Jacob said the community had swung into action after the Government refused to pay for the work, or even help fund it on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Ms Jacobs said the community had reasonable expectations that big regional centres such as Tamworth should offer facilities commensurate with those in Sydney for cancer sufferers.  
*Sun Herald, 8/2/09, p24*

**Public health: Breast cancer death rate keeps falling**

Breast cancer deaths continue to plunge in Queensland despite more women developing the disease as the population ages. Cancer Council Queensland figures show annual breast cancer deaths dropped from 471 in 2005 to 432 in 2006 despite a big increase in the state's population. But the council's chief executive officer Jeff Dunn, said breast cancer incidence was on the rise, with more than 2500 Queenslanders diagnosed in 2006. "The main contributor is the fact that women are getting older. But there's also evidence of lifestyle factors as well – obesity, physical inactivity, tobacco use and alcohol," he said.

Professor Dunn said the decline in death rates showed breast cancer screening programs were working.

Breast cancer survivor Megan Dwyer 41, is working with the council to organise an international support conference in May for women who have had breast cancer. She said the aim of the three-day Reach to Recovery Breast Cancer Support Conference was to discuss the best ways to help people with the disease, particularly from an emotional viewpoint.

The conference takes place May 13-15.

*Courier Mail, 6/2/09, p20*

### **Risk: HRT, breast cancer link backed by new study**

The controversial debate about the safety of hormone replacement therapy in menopause has been reignited by US researchers' claims that there is no doubt rates of breast cancer dropped after thousands of women around the world were scared off the pills.

Californian doctors writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* said yesterday that the use of HRT fell sharply in the US after results from the massive Women's Health Initiative in 2002 warned that the treatment increased the risk of breast cancer.

There was a halving of hormone use between 2000 and 2003, coinciding with a 43% decrease in breast cancer between 2002 and 2003.

Some experts have argued that the dip in breast cancer rates could have been due to changing use of mammograms, because women taking HRT were more likely to have a breast X-ray, leading to more tumours being detected.

But in the latest study, researchers said there was no evidence that mammogram use had changed and there was now little doubt of the connection between HRT and breast cancer.

They found that post-menopausal women who took HRT with oestrogen and progestin, or so-called combined therapy, for at least five years doubled their annual risk of breast cancer.

Dr Marcia Stefanick, from Stanford University, said there was a very strong evidence that combined HRT caused breast cancer, although the results did not apply to women on oestrogen-only pills.

"You start women on hormones and within five years their risk for breast cancer is clearly elevated," she said. "You stop the hormones and within five years their risk is essentially back to normal. It's reasonably convincing cause-and-effect data."

Australian expert Henry Burger, from the Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health, said he still had concerns about how results from the WHI study were being interpreted, often causing exaggerated fears in women. The general message remained that many women who used HRT in the short term faced no increased risk of breast cancer.

But he was revising his overall advice because there was growing evidence that many factors affected a woman's risk, including age and weight, the type of pills she took, and how long she stayed on HRT.

*West Australian, 6/2/09, p3*

### **Environment: Sometimes you don't need the air that you breathe**

Every year up to 200 Australians develop lung cancer simply because the air in their homes is polluted with an invisible toxin. The air appears normal but contains a toxic gas called radon.

When they inhale it, little particles can deposit on the sensitive lining of their lungs, causing radiation damage that, over time, can develop into cancer.

It has long been known that indoor radon can cause lung cancer, particularly in smokers, but because Australia has such low levels of it, it was never regarded as much of a public hazard.

However, recent evidence shows the levels don't have to be that high to cause the cancer. It has been shown that 95% of radon-related lung cancer occurs at levels many countries, including Australia, would regard as relatively safe.

Research published in the *British Medical Journal* last month found that every year in the United Kingdom about 1100 people die of lung cancer related to radon in their home.

Calculations in Australia have not been done but according to Peter Burns, the acting chief executive of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, the numbers here would be between 100 and 200.

*Australian Financial Review, 5/2/09, p58*

### **Obesity: Obesity is parents' fault**

Children copy their parents' food choices, University of South Australia scientists have found. Researcher Dorota Zarnowiecki has studied the health and not so healthy habits of more than 200 families.

She gave them options ranging from fruit and vegetables to lollies and potato chips and found children's choices tended to echo their parents', despite other influences.

"We looked at five and six year olds because we wanted to gauge their parents' influence, as they haven't had that much exposure to the outside world," she said.

"This shows firstly that young children are able to learn and...distinguish between healthy and unhealthy foods. It also shows that parents are really important at that young age, so it could be used even in pre-natal classes."

Yesterday, a parliamentary inquiry was told an obesity campaign featuring a young man who becomes fatter as he grows older has struck a chord with more than 6 million Australians. The \$30 million *Measure Up* campaign has been described by Health Department experts as highly successful.

Giving evidence to a parliamentary inquiry into the nation's obesity crisis, experts said the campaign had resulted in 6.8 million hits to the [measureup.gov.au](http://measureup.gov.au) website.

Overweight Australians have requested almost 300,000 healthy eating plans and tape measures from the site.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 5/2/09, p16*

#### **Skin: Laser lights up skin cancers**

US researchers have developed a hand-held laser device they claim can identify malignant skin lesions within seconds. If it proves accurate, it may make invasive skin biopsies unnecessary.

Doctors at the Vanderbilt Medical Centre, Nashville, Tennessee, said preliminary trials had shown the device accurately identified basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma.

The device can differentiate between normal skin and different kinds of skin lesions.

*Australian Financial Review, 5/2/09, p58*

#### **Support: Cancer help on the road**

Cancer Council Tasmania is hitting the road. As part of World Cancer Day celebrations the council yesterday launched its new bus, Mobile Information and Support Service (MISS) in Hobart.

Cancer Council director of community programs Celia Taylor said the purpose-fitted bus allowed services to be provided to people in remote areas.

*Hobart Mercury, 5/2/09, p6*

#### **Tobacco: 'Raise tobacco taxes or Australia will fail targets'**

Australia will fail to meet its 2020 smoking target unless efforts to curb tobacco use are dramatically increased, health authorities have been warned.

Researchers at the University of Queensland have projected the nation's future smoking rate, based on current quit and uptake numbers adjusted for foreseeable changes in the population.

It shows that while Australia's smoking rate has dropped from about 35% of the adult population in 1980 to now less than 20%, the decline would slow to 14% by 2020. This is well over the 9% target for daily smokers announced by the Federal Government's new Preventative Health Taskforce – a level now not projected to be reached until about 2040, based on a business-as-usual scenario.

Post-doctoral research fellow who headed the research Coral Gartner said, "If we just continue on as we are, we are still going to have a substantial proportion of the population smoking in 2020. It shows we will have to ramp up efforts if we are going to meet that [target]."

Dr Gartner said the number of people now kicking the habit must double if the smoking rate was to dip below 10% over the next 11 years – and the key way to drive this was raising the tobacco tax.

Increasing access to quit medications through subsidies, allowing use of controversial "smokeless" electronic cigarettes to help people quit, more media campaigns to highlight the risks, and forcing cigarette companies to abandon their last marketing avenue – by putting cigarettes in plain packets behind the counter – should also play a role, Dr Gartner said.

*Canberra Times, 5/2/09, p3; Age, 5/2/09, p4; Daily Telegraph, 5/2/09, p15*

### **Obesity: Obesity fast becoming the greatest cancer risk**

Obesity is the fastest-growing health threat facing the world's population and is emerging as a key driver of growing rates of cancer, a major international report warns.

An International Union Against Cancer scientific review, co-authored by WA experts and released today for World Cancer Day, says more cancers are being linked to people carrying too much weight and makes the grim prediction that excess weight will contribute to an estimated 15 million new cases of cancer a year by 2020.

Being overweight is now convincingly linked to cancers of the oesophagus, kidney, pancreas, uterus, breast and bowel.

The report blamed the "21<sup>st</sup>-century plague" on a range of lifestyle factors, including people eating larger portion sizes and more high-kilojoule foods, often in the form of fast foods. Longer workdays and the growing number of households with more than one person working meant there was less time for people to prepare healthy meals at home, the report said. Co-author Steve Pratt, from Cancer Council WA, said a lack of understanding about the connection between body-weight and cancer was placing West Australians at a higher risk of the disease.

Mr Pratt said that the report identified obesity and being overweight as major health threats, even in developing countries where under-nutrition was a problem.

It was estimated that up to 40% of all cancers could be prevented by people eating well and exercising to avoid obesity.

"The key message here is that after quitting smoking, the next best thing you can do to reduce your risk of cancer and that of your children is to maintain a healthy body weight and be physically active."

*West Australian, 4/2/09, p15*

### **Public health: \$10bn cost of cancer**

The Cancer Institute has, for the first time, calculated the human and economic cost of cancer. As the number of cases more than doubles, NSW will face a \$10 billion annual bill for health care, lost wages and profits.

The State Government-funded study even puts a figure on the money lost in taxes to Treasury - \$24 billion by 2016.

Minister Assisting the Minister for Health on Cancer Jodi McKay, said the disease would "double dip" the state. "Cancer not only will increase the cost of health care, but it also will erode the economy's ability to pay for health care," she said.

Prostate cancer cases are predicted to increase 52.5% in the next 10 years, followed by breast cancer (39%), colorectal cancer (28%), melanoma (25%) and lung cancer (11%).

*Daily Telegraph, 4/2/09, p15*

### **Treatment: Plea for help as cancer services' demand soars**

The ACT Cancer Council says oncology services in the capital must keep up with growing demand from Canberra's ageing population. Cancer information consultant Kate Aignar, said, "[They need] to ensure that services grow with the growing demand and anyone diagnosed with cancer has timely access to cancer services in the ACT."

The Cancer Council will mark World Cancer Day today with a presentation at Canberra Hospital.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher said the territory was building its cancer services but acknowledged some patients would have to wait or travel interstate for treatment. "I'm not sure any health system can say we can always provide you with treatment in exactly the right time, in the right place, but luckily we have close relationships with NSW and Victoria if we need to use their services."

Ms Gallagher said the Government would consider fast-tracking a fourth linear accelerator planned for 2011-12 to help treat cancer patients in the territory.

*Canberra Times, 4/2/09, p4*

### **Detection: Be aware: likely warning signs for ovarian cancer**

There is no screening test for ovarian cancer, meaning it is often discovered too late, but new Australian research shows it is not always a "silent killer".

More than 80% of women who have the cancer experience at least one related early warning symptom in the year before their diagnosis, according to a new study which assessed 1500 sufferers.

It is hoped improved awareness of the warning signs will lead to earlier diagnosis, as a majority of women only discover the cancer in its advanced stages when it is the most difficult to treat.

The chief executive of the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, which did the study, Dr Helen Zorbas, said, "The vast majority of women do experience ovarian cancer symptoms in the year prior to their diagnosis, so it's not the silent killer that we used to say it was." Symptoms experienced by 83% of the women well before their ovarian cancer diagnosis included abdominal or back pain, appetite loss or feeling full quickly.

Other red flags reported by the women included changes in toilet habits, unexplained weight loss or gain, indigestion or heartburn, and fatigue.

"This is not about creating unnecessary alarm...but if the symptoms are unusual for you and they persist then they warrant investigation," Dr Zorbas said.

The study also found 17% of women with the symptoms waited more than 3 months before seeing their doctor, and 8% waited more than 6 months. Common reasons for the delay included assuming the symptoms were "not serious", were linked to routine ailments or that they were a natural part of ageing.

*Canberra Times, 3/2/09, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 3/2/09, p2; West Australian, 3/2/09, p5; Daily Telegraph, 3/2/09, p4*

### **Obesity: Fat children 'adding to Australia's cancer toll'**

Cancer experts have warned of a rising number of cases linked to Australia's high rate of childhood obesity.

Cancer Council Australia chief executive Professor Ian Olver said a worrying cycle was emerging, as overweight and obese children often became the next generation of overweight and obese adults who, in turn, had a "significantly increased" risk of developing cancer.

"Put these together and we're facing a potential spike in obesity-related cancers, including breast and bowel cancer, over the next few decades," Professor Olver warned before World Cancer Day tomorrow.

"So World Cancer Day should remind the Government that we must act now to reduce childhood overweight and obesity, and prevent thousands of premature cancer deaths in Australia."

World Cancer Day is organised by the International Union Against Cancer and its theme for 2009 is to "encourage an energy-balanced lifestyle".

Professor Olver said the theme again highlighted the urgency for the Federal Government to adopt its own Preventative Health Taskforce's recommendations for a comprehensive national obesity strategy this year.

*Canberra Times, 3/2/09, p5; Adelaide Advertiser, 3/2/09, p6; Daily Telegraph, 3/2/09, p8; Australian Financial Review, 3/2/09, p6*

### **Obesity: The rise and rise of Generation O**

The number of obese children will continue to increase unless governments find the political will to take on the powerful food, motor and advertising industries, public health experts say. The Federal Government's Obesity Working Group, which is due to report its recommendations to the National Preventative Health Taskforce in June, admits no country has yet been successful in reversing the trend of rising levels of overweight and obese people.

In the past decade the prevalence of overweight children has almost doubled and numbers of obese children have more than tripled, according to a report in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

"There's a lot of talk, there's some money but virtually no real policies to back all this up," Professor of Population Health at Deakin University, Boyd Swinburn said. "We've got parliamentary inquiries and preventative taskforces and reviews for marketing of junk food to kids and consultation documents, but when there is such strong commercial pressure by marketing and food industries we're not holding our breath that something concrete will come out of any of these."

*Sydney Morning Herald, 3/2/09, p5*

**Treatment: Prostate cancer treatment a step closer**

Melbourne scientists have developed a potential treatment for prostate cancer, the third leading cause of death in men. After more than 10 years of research, Associate Professor Pei Xiang Xing, a scientist with the Burnet Institute, has discovered an antibody that kills cancer cells in laboratory models of the disease. The findings could be tested on humans as early as 2011.

According to an article recently published in *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, the antibody binds to a molecule responsible for the proliferation of cancer cells, creating a chain of events that destroys the cancer cells in mice.

The therapeutic effect of the antibody improved when it was combined with other drugs currently used to treat prostate cancer.

Professor Brendan Crabb, the director of the Burnet Institute, said new strategies to treat prostate cancer were urgently required because there was no efficient treatment.

"This is an exciting step in the development of new treatments for patients with prostate cancer with very promising laboratory test results," he said.

*Age, 3/2/09, p4*

**Obesity: One in two adults overweight, campaign warns**

A \$3.1 million Statewide campaign to tackle weight gain and obesity was launched yesterday, amid alarming figures showing that one in two West Australian adults is overweight.

The Draw the Line Campaign run by the Heart Foundation, Cancer Council WA and Diabetes WA encourages people to eat less sugar and fat, eat smaller portions, sit less and be more active.

Funded by the Health Department, it is the first WA-developed campaign targeting weight.

Cancer Council education and research director Terry Slevin said being overweight was a risk factor for heart disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes.

*West Australian, 2/2/09, p11*

**Obesity: Plan to seize obese kids**

Children could be taken away from their parents if they become too fat under a controversial proposal by an Australian doctor.

With one in four children overweight or obese, Dr Shirley Alexander, from the Children's Hospital at Westmead, wants parents to be disciplined in "extreme cases" when their child becomes too overweight.

Under the proposal, child protection agencies would be called in to seize a child when parents have repeatedly failed to address diet problems. "We argue that in a sufficiently extreme case, notification of child protection services may be an appropriate professional response," Dr Alexander said.

Dr Alexander's report concludes that a doctor is duty bound to "report severe cases of inadequately managed paediatric obesity to the authorities".

The report is published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

*Daily Telegraph, 2/2/09, p3; Age, 2/2/09, p3*

**Skin: Mum begs for laws on solariums**

The mother of skin cancer victim Clare Oliver has written to the State Government pleading for tougher solarium laws. "Clare used to get special deals from the solarium," Mrs Oliver wrote. "She used to be told that using a solarium every second day was the best way to get a tan."

While the Government has rolled out some draft laws, Mrs Oliver is calling on Premier Nathan Rees to bring in strong regulations, as Victoria has.

"We are pleased the Government has taken the first step towards regulating tanning beds," Cancer Council NSW's Anita Tang said. "But without some form of licensing, the whole scheme is flawed."

*Daily Telegraph, 2/2/09, p2*

**Treatment: 70 patients given radiation overdoses**

More than 70 cancer patients have received radiation overdoses because a machine at a North Coast hospital was incorrectly calibrated, in the latest chapter of NSW Health's horror story.

Health Minister John Della Bosca's department said yesterday it would investigate how a radiotherapy machine at the Coffs Harbour Integrated Cancer Care Centre was incorrectly calibrated for 17 months. The independent review will determine if any patients suffered adverse effects.

Led by the director of radiation oncology at Liverpool Hospital, Professor Geoff Delaney, it will investigate why the error was not picked up until an annual check on January 5.

The chief executive of the North Coast Area Health Service, Chris Crawford, apologised to the 72 patients who received the elevated doses between August 2007 and January 2009 and said each would be contacted personally.

He said initial advice indicated that they had not been adversely affected because they received up to 4.8% extra radiation which was under the acceptable variation of 5%, laid down by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Organisation.

The executive officer of Cancer Voices Australia, John Stubbs, applauded the Government for being open about the error, but said it demonstrated the need for a dosimetry centre to check levels in all radiotherapy units across Australia.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 31/1/09, p3*