

CANCER IN THE NEWS JANUARY 2009

Public health: Man sent home with headache dies of tumour

A 24-year-old man who was discharged from Griffith Base Hospital on Monday with a bad headache died the following day from an undiagnosed brain tumour, his family says. An investigation is underway into the death of Hay resident, Brendan Burns, who was surrounded by family on Tuesday night when doctors switched off his life support machine in Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital.

Mr Burns died from a small brain tumour that went undiagnosed during his attendance at Griffith Base Hospital on Australia Day.

A statement released yesterday by the Greater Southern Area Health Service on behalf of chief executive, Heather Gray, confirmed Mr Burn's death was under investigation.

Sydney Morning Herald, 30/1/09, p6

Research: Cancer research jobs face the axe (NSW)

Cancer researchers have been told they will lose their jobs as cost-cutting measures force Sydney hospitals to take drastic measures.

At least six researchers at the Prince of Wales Oncology Research Centre have been told their positions will be axed, while another dozen physiotherapists and occupational therapists are also facing unemployment.

Premier Nathan Rees is seeking \$2.5 billion from the Federal Government to prop up the ailing health system.

The Health Services Union has condemned the State Government for targeting cancer research. "You have to wonder how it will be affected when a centre like that has six permanent staff all of a sudden go," Dennis Ravlich, HSU organiser, said.

Daily Telegraph, 30/1/09, p2

Risk: Nutritionist sceptical of sausage-leukaemia link

Children who regularly eat cured and processed meat may be at a great risk of leukaemia, a study suggests, but an Australian nutritionist says parents need not panic if their children have been tucking into hot dogs and salami.

Scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health surveyed 515 children and teenagers from Taiwan, some of whom had leukaemia, and found that those who ate cured meat or fish regularly were 74% more likely to develop the disease.

Those who ate vegetables and soy-based foods regularly were 50% less likely than their meat-eating counterparts to develop leukaemia.

However, the study, published in the online journal *BMC Cancer*, did not include a detailed examination of why the foods caused the higher incidence of cancer, and Australian researchers have questioned the findings.

Cancer Council NSW nutritionist Kathy Chapman said: "It's a very small sample size to be making these kinds of associations between diet and cancer risk. Normally when we look at a study like this you would be looking at 20,000 participants. Also, the best type of studies are those which follow people over time rather than asking them about what they did in the past."

The authors of the research have acknowledged their research is not definitive but recommend that children not eat large amounts of cured meat and fish.

Sydney Morning Herald, 30/1/09, p3

Prevention: Vaccine plea to women (TAS)

Tasmanian women have been urged to take up a cervical cancer vaccine after the Federal Government made it free for an additional six months.

General Practice Tasmania spokeswoman and doctor Leanne Jones said females up to the age of 26 could now access the vaccination for free until December 31. But she said they had to have the first shot in a series of three before June 30.

The vaccination will cost \$450 for a course of three shots from 2010.

In March last year it was estimated 60 to 80% of Tasmanian girls aged 12 to 18 had had the vaccine, but the 12 to 26-year take-up was only about 50%.

Hobart Mercury, 29/1/09, p24

Prevention: Miracle cancer vaccine 'gets closer'

Adelaide researchers are confident they can create the “holy grail” of cancer prevention with a multi-purpose vaccine. The University of South Australia team is working on a vaccine that would prevent one in five cancers by eliminating infections that cause cancer. Chronic infections such as human papillomavirus, hepatitis B and HIV can lead to a range of deadly cancers.

Team leader Dr John Hayball, senior immunology lecturer, is working on the project in conjunction with Associate Professor Michael Brown from the Royal Adelaide Hospital’s Hanson Institute.

He said while the work was in the “pre-clinical and experimental” phase, the “ultimate aim” was not just to prevent cancer-causing infections, but to cure the existing ones.

“We’re trying to make therapeutic vaccines, so instead of making vaccines that just protect you from getting an infection – these vaccines will also do that – but the idea is to actually kill the diseases that people carry,” he said.

“We’re trying to develop a platform technology that can be used for any number of chronic viral infectious diseases, a lot of which are associated with causing cancer. If we can eliminate those infections, there’s a real possibility of cutting the incidence of cancer by one fifth and obviously that’s a huge leap forward.”

Dr Hayball said the research would be conducted into making existing vaccine responses more durable. “What you really want from a vaccine is a one-shot cure, you don’t want to be coming back for boosters your whole life.”

Adelaide Advertiser, 29/1/09, p1; Daily Telegraph, 29/1/09, p9

Research: Bashful Brits may skew s-x research

Research linking frequent s-x and m-sturbation in young men to an increased prostate cancer risk could be skewed due to a British aversion to being labelled “w-nkers”, an Australian expert warns.

A new British study found men diagnosed with prostate cancer reported more frequent ejaculations in their 20s and 30s, leading researchers to conclude it was a possible risk factor. But this runs counter to a major Melbourne-based study published in 2003, which took in 2000 men and found that increased s-xual activity reduced the cancer risk.

The Australian study was led by the head of cancer epidemiology at Cancer Council Victoria, Professor Graham Giles, and he said his results were confirmed by another major study.

“They found that men who were ejaculating the most in their 20s, had about a third of the risk of prostate cancer than men who were ejaculating less frequently,” Professor Giles said. “So there’s two studies that show this protective effect and one smaller study from Nottingham that shows the opposite.”

The British study’s lead author, Dr Polyxeni Dimitropoulou, wrote in the journal *BJU International*, “Overall we found a significant association between prostate cancer and s-xual activity in a man’s twenties, and between m-sturbation and prostate cancer in the twenties and thirties.”

But Professor Giles said he suspected men with cancer were more likely to be honest about their s-xual practices and history, particularly when it came to m-sturbation. “And I just wonder whether the poms are still a bit bashful”.

Canberra Times, 29/1/09, p5

Prevention: Clever foods fight cancer

The front line in the disease-fighting efforts of the future may be food, not pharmaceuticals. Clever foods that help fight illnesses ranging from cancer to heart disease are being developed in laboratories around the world.

And now researchers at Adelaide’s Flinders University believe feeding selenium to dairy cows could help prevent bowel cancer.

Researchers at the Flinders Centre for Cancer Prevention and Control found that mice injected with a cancer-causing agent and then fed selenium-enriched milk protein had a 67% reduction in numbers of tumours compared with those fed selenium-enriched yeast.

The milk protein was produced by feeding selenium-enriched yeast to dairy cows. “Whatever the cow does to the selenium to put it into the milk, it turns it into a form that is available to our bodies,” says Flinders gastroenterologist Graeme Young.

His team is now conducting a trial to see whether humans are as good as mice at absorbing the selenium from enriched milk.

If selenium-enriched milk proves to be safe and effective in humans, the next challenge will be for the food industry to bring a range of potentially cancer-preventing dairy products to market.

Australian, 28/1/09, p30

Skin: ACT hold off solarium decision

The ACT Government will not consider regulating local solariums until at least March. The Greens and Cancer Council have urged the Government to regulate the industry in Canberra. But Chief Minister Jon Stanhope says the Government will wait for a national report on the issue compiled by the Radiation Health Council.

Standards Australia has introduced new guidelines for solarium operators, including a ban on users younger than 18 years and people with skin that always burns.

The guidelines are voluntary but Victoria will adopt the guidelines as legislation from February 1. Queensland and South Australia have also banned under-age tanners.

Cancer Council ACT wants to see solariums regulated in Canberra and says the territory cannot afford to wait for a national approach.

Canberra Times, 28/1/09, p5

Environment: Freak fish spark cancer fears

The foreman of a Queensland hatchery plagued by fish deaths, deformities and abnormalities will today ask Queensland Health to investigate a possible cancer cluster.

All four households near the Sunland Fish Hatchery and a large macadamia plantation have had a cancer death or diagnosis since problems with the fish began about four years ago.

Sunland foreman Bernard Gevers is being treated for suspected bowel cancer, possibly linked to the cocktail of agricultural chemicals – herbicide, pesticides, fungicides, and wetting agents – sprayed on the nut trees.

Sydney University cancer specialist Bruce Armstrong said: "One of the reasons one might do an investigation is that there is a suspect exposure (to agrichemicals). The fact that they are of sufficient concentration to be causing (problems with animals) is a cause of concern."

Australian, 27/1/09, p3

Environment: Britain says soldiers exposed to nuke lack proof of link to illness

Veterans of Britain's nuclear bomb tests in Australia have no evidence to prove their health problems were caused by the radioactive blasts, a London court has heard.

Lawyers for the British Government's Ministry of Defence told the High Court that claims about how the veterans had suffered a variety of illnesses since the tests more than 50 years ago were not backed up by solid medical evidence.

More than 800 veterans have gone to the High Court in the hope they will be given the go-ahead to sue the ministry for compensation because it was allegedly negligent for allowing them to be exposed to radiation during the tests between 1952 and 1958.

Many claim to have suffered a variety of illnesses from cancer to skin defects and fertility problems.

But the ministry's barrister, Charles Gibson. QC, told the court that while the veterans were owed a "debt of gratitude" for their service, they had nothing to prove their exposure to radiation from the bomb blasts caused their health problems.

Canberra Times, 24/1/09, p10

Obesity: As bad as having cancer

Obese children have a quality of life similar to young cancer patients, do worse at school and suffer twice as much pain as their normal-weight school friends, research reveals.

A nationwide study comparing obese 10 to 13-year-old children with lean or normal kids has shown obese children find it harder to concentrate in the classroom, are more likely to suffer back pain and lower limb pain and have greater trouble sleeping.

Courier Mail, 24/1/09, p33

Prevention: Free cervical cancer vaccine to end soon

A third of young women have not taken advantage of the cervical cancer vaccine, with many not realising it will soon cease to be free.

A survey has found 33% of women aged 18 to 26 have not yet taken advantage of the Government's National Human Papillomavirus Vaccination Program, which ends in June. After that, they will have to pay for the vaccine.

The survey of 1004 women found 63% of unvaccinated women did not realise the free vaccination program would soon end. A third (34%) of unvaccinated women said they were too busy to get the vaccination, while one-quarter said they were too scared of needles. About one in three unvaccinated women said getting the vaccination was one of their resolutions for 2009.

Canberra Times, 27/1/09, p3; Sydney Morning Herald, 27/1/09, p2; Daily Telegraph, 27/1/09, p7; Hobart Mercury, 27/1/09, p8; Adelaide Advertiser, 27/1/09, p15

Skin: Tough sunbed rule for salons

Solariums will be forced to cut UV intensity on sunbeds by 40% and ban under-18s and fair-skinned people, under a new national standard. Sunbed operators will also have to warn clients that ultraviolet radiation from tanning units cause cancer.

The new standard is voluntary but will form the basis of legislative reform on the use of solariums across the country. Today the Victorian Government will announce that it will adopt key measures of the standards as law.

The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change is also expected to adopt the standard, after a public consultation period, which ends on February 6.

Standards Australia CEO, John Tucker said it would also be used as a guide for law reform in other states and territories.

The new AS/NZS Solaria for cosmetic purposes was rushed through after the death of Melbourne woman Claire Oliver in 2007.

Cancer Council Australia's Craig Sinclair said the new standard was tougher in two ways. For the first time, the standard will not only ban from solariums people with skin type 1 (skin that always burns and never tans), but also people with skin type 2 (skin that burns easily and tans minimally).

The other important new measure is that sunbeds will have to reduce their UV intensity by 40%.

Other major features of the new standard include:

- Banning unsupervised operations and ensuring staff are trained in using equipment and assessing skin photo types
- Ensuring that clients complete skin assessment and consent forms
- Ensuring protective eye-wear is always worn
- Making no claims of non-cosmetic health benefits or that solarium use is safe
- Keeping client records for at least two years covering the date, time of visit, skin type assessment and level of exposure.

Sunday Telegraph, 25/1/09, p13; Canberra Times, 26/1/09, p4; Age, 26/1/09, p7; Sunday Herald Sun, 25/1/09, p17; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 25/1/09, p31

Skin: Don't forget to slip slop when stepping out in flip-flops

The nation's thong lovers are putting their lives at risk, experts have warned. Dermatologist Catherine Faulkner said thongs left their wearers dangerously exposed to skin cancer.

"Often sunscreens are washed off the top of the feet when people walk through water, so we do see quite a lot of skin cancer on the top of the feet," she said.

People should check not only the tops of their feet but also their soles and underneath nails for suspicious signs, she said.

Courier Mail, 26/1/09, p7

Tobacco: Stubbing out alfresco smoking draws protest (WA)

A smoking ban in alfresco dining areas in Perth's busy CBD and Northbridge is a step closer as the council pushes ahead with its plan to outlaw the habit in outdoor restaurants and cafes by July.

Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi said that the ban was important to improve Perth's cafe culture and there was little opposition to the move.

Business owners disagree and warn that the ban will be unpopular with the public and will severely damage trade, sending some restaurants and cafes out of business.

Perth City Council's proposed alfresco dining law, which has been released for public comment until March 13, requires all outdoor eating areas to be non-smoking.

West Australian, 27/1/09, p7

Skin: ECU chases spreading melanoma

Perth researchers are breaking new ground in detecting dangerous melanoma by using a blood test to work out how the skin cancer turns deadly and spreads to other parts of the body.

Supported by a \$70,000 Cancer Council WA grant, Edith Cowan University scientists are using a newly developed test which detects when melanoma cells migrate into the bloodstream to see what triggers them to turn into the cells that cause secondary tumours. Melanomas only become deadly when aggressive cells spread to other parts of the body, so experts believe that stopping this, possibly through drugs, could markedly reduce the number of deaths from the skin cancer.

"By analysing the genetics of these dangerous cells, it is hoped that we can reduce the prevalence of secondary tumours caused by melanomas," Associate Professor Melanie Ziman said. "From our original work with the blood test we were alarmed to find that even people who had melanoma tumours removed many years before still had markers for the cancer floating around in the bloodstream and so we also need to find out if that means they are still dangerous."

West Australian, 23/1/09, p12

Treatment: new nano-drug to fight cancer

Women with advanced breast cancer will be offered the first nanoparticle anti-cancer drug to be approved in Australia, which promises to be not only more potent than other drugs but also cause fewer side effects.

From next month, women with breast cancer which has spread will get free access to Abraxane by the distributor Specialised Therapeutics Australia while it waits for the chemotherapy agent to be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Abraxane is solvent free and uses the human protein albumin to bind it, reducing severe side effects and allergic reactions which can force patients off drugs and jeopardise recovery.

The manufacturer says the additional use of nanotechnology allows tiny particles of the drug to be more readily absorbed into the body and deliver a 50% higher dose compared with regular drugs, but without being toxic to women. Trials have shown the drug can more than double the response in tumours, improving patient survival rates.

Cancer experts deem the new drug an important tool in the fight against advanced cancer where survival largely depends on patients tolerating lifesaving drugs for as long as needed.

West Australian, 23/1/09, p5

Environment: PM resists asbestos probe

Australia's rate of asbestos cancers are "very bad figures", Prime Minister Rudd has said, but he balked at demands that he hold an inquiry into asbestos use across the country.

Australia has some of the world's highest rates of asbestos diseases. By 2020, 40,000 cases of asbestos-related lung cancer will have been diagnosed in Australia, and 13,000 further Australians will have developed mesothelioma.

Speaking at the official opening of the Bernie Banton Asbestos Disease Research Centre in Sydney, Mr Rudd said thousands of Australians had been exposed to asbestos at work in previous generations.

He did not comment on the current issue of current government employees still facing occupational exposure to the deadly carcinogen.

Earlier this month it was revealed thousands of Australian sailors and defence force contractors were probably being exposed to asbestos because the Navy was illegally continuing to use asbestos parts in breach of a nationwide ban brought in in 2004.

Unions and asbestos disease interest groups have demanded a national inquiry into asbestos use across Australia, as well as a taskforce to address defence force negligence, but the Government has, so far, refused to agree.

The Banton research centre will be the largest of its kind in the world, dedicated to researching asbestos diseases in the search for a cure.

Age, 22/1/09, p4; Adelaide Advertiser, 22/1/09, p32; Sydney Morning Herald, 22/1/09, p9

Prevention: Doubters put Gardasil program at risk: study

The success of Australia's \$537 million program to reduce rates of cervical cancer could be jeopardised by young women shunning the vaccine because they are not convinced it can help them, a new study has revealed.

NSW sexual health experts who questioned 300 women aged 15 to 26 blamed GPs in part for not convincing their patients that the human papilloma virus vaccine Gardasil was safe and effective.

While the vaccine's maker CSL estimates that about two-thirds of eligible women have had the vaccine through GPs, researchers say the expected reduction in cervical cancer depended on maximum coverage of eligible girls.

Writing in the journal *Australian Family Physician*, the University of Sydney and Family Planning NSW researchers said the reluctance of some young women to have the vaccine was a concern because many did not practice safe sex such as using condoms.

"Although three-quarters had attended a general practice in the past six months, one-third were unaware that they could obtain a free vaccine. This suggests that many GPs are not discussing the vaccine with eligible women."

The study found that because the vaccine could only protect against types of HPV that people had not already been exposed to, some women believed the vaccine would not work if they were already sexually active.

But the researchers said it was unlikely that these women had been exposed to all four HPV types which the vaccine guarded against.

West Australian, 22/1/09, p17

Detection: Breast cancer scans a lingerie extra

Women will be able to combine retail therapy with healthcare in department stores, which have opened breast cancer screening clinics on the shop floor.

The NSW Breast Cancer Institute and Myer are trialling a service where customers can have mammograms in the lingerie departments of four Sydney stores.

The mammograms are then transmitted in seconds to the BCI Breast Centre at Westmead, where they are read by two doctors.

The clinics – the first of which opened yesterday at Parramatta – will be fitted with the latest digital screening equipment to reduce examination time and improve accuracy, reporting time and image quality.

BCI executive director John Boyages said "We live in a juggling society where women are juggling children and grandchildren, juggling their work and often leave themselves to last. Here's a chance to have a mammogram when you're shopping."

Australian, 20/1/09, p5

Environment: The hidden killer lurking in shacks

Tasmanian shack owners have been warned to take care when renovating or doing maintenance because of the danger of asbestos. Michael Cooper from advisory service Archicentre said yesterday asbestos was rife in old buildings such as shacks.

He said people should be very mindful of the danger the material posed. "Our real concern is that with the increase of DIY renovations, people may not recognise the extreme health risks involved for homeowners and their families of the diseases which can be caused by asbestos dust."

Up to a third of Tasmanian homes are believed to contain asbestos in some form and it is feared a wave of mesothelioma cases may come from homeowners who carry out renovations or maintenance.

Hobart Mercury, 20/1/09, p5

Risk: Gene-clear family link ups breast cancer risk

Women with a strong family history of breast cancer have more than a one-in-three risk of developing the disease even if they do not have one of the known genetic mutations such as BRCA1 and BRCA2, new research has revealed.

A Canadian study due to be published in the *British Journal of Cancer* is believed to be the first of its kind to quantify the risk of breast cancer in women who have close relatives affected by the disease but are not known to have a faulty gene themselves.

University of Toronto scientists looked at women who had one first-degree relative – such as a mother or sister – who developed breast cancer under the age of 50 as well as at least one relative with the disease.

They found the women were up to four times more likely than average to develop breast cancer compared with the rate of one in nine in the general population.

Lead researcher Steven Narod said women who inherited a defective gene had an 80% chance of developing breast cancer.

While the risk was lower in women with only a family history, it was significant enough for doctors to consider preventative drug treatment to stop them developing cancer.

"This is the first time the breast cancer risk for this group of women has been measured, and it's significantly higher than that of the general population," Dr Narod said.

West Australian, 20/1/09, p5

Tobacco: Anti-smoking lobby urges larger warnings

A key anti-smoking group has called for bigger warnings on cigarette packets after finding nearly half of smokers do not know their habit causes lung cancer.

The research from Cancer Council Victoria showed 21.5% of the state's smokers think the dangers of smoking are exaggerated and 49% do not identify lung cancer as a smoking-caused illness.

Almost two-thirds did not spontaneously identify smoking as a cause of emphysema, heart disease or heart attack.

The Quit anti-smoking group wants the Federal Government to force cigarette companies to display larger warnings on packets. Quit policy manager Kylie Lindorff said the group wanted 90% of the front of the pack to be dedicated to anti-smoking messages.

"We would also like plain packaging, so the companies can't use the pack as a mini-billboard to reassure smokers that smoking isn't as bad as they think it is," Ms Lindorff said.

The information came from a survey of 3000 Victorian smokers.

Hobart Mercury, 20/1/09, p12

Risk: Pill can trigger cancer

Taking the Pill or having hormone replacement therapy can trigger cancer-causing gene mutations, scientists say. A study to be published today has identified how the hormone estrogen in oral contraceptives and HRT pills can start a bio-chemical chain reaction that undermines women's natural defences against cancer.

Researchers found estrogen plays a key role in fighting infections such as the common cold. But they also discovered that exposure to high levels can trigger genetic mutations that can cause cancer.

While an association between estrogen and cancer has long been known, the finding provides the first evidence of how they are linked, and could help scientists treat the disease. Dr Svend Petersen-Mahrt, at Cancer Research UK's laboratories, said: "We found estrogen plays an important role in generating the diversity in the immune system that helps our bodies fight off a range of infections. "But prolonged exposure will lead to genetic changes which have been found to cause cancer."

Herald Sun, 19/1/09, p21

Treatment: Doctors call for review of cancer treatments

Cancer treatments should be independently reviewed to ensure toxic, expensive and ineffective drugs are not being overused at the expense of patients and taxpayers, according to leading oncologists.

The CEO of Cancer Council Australia, Professor Ian Olver, and Melbourne oncologist Dr Ian Haines, said a lack of independent research into the outcomes of cancer drugs meant it was difficult to know how effective treatments were for patients and those paying for the drugs.

Writing in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, the doctors said there had been a decline in independent research over the past 10 years, with drug companies often paying doctors for their work and influencing treatment guidelines.

There had also been a shift in clinical trials from using drugs until maximum response and then stopping the treatment to avoid toxicity, in favour of using drugs for as long as they were tolerated, the doctors said.

"There are no survival or quality-of-life data to support this increase in treatment duration, which adds enormous costs if this design becomes the 'evidence base'," they wrote.

Australia also relied too heavily on the interpretation of clinical studies and their incorporation into guidelines by foreign clinical organisations, particularly those in the United States, which were heavily influenced by drug companies and special interest groups.

Professor Olver and Dr Haines said Australia needed a comprehensive system to evaluate the outcomes of treatments, particularly after they were approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The doctors said high-quality data would help patients and their doctors achieve the appropriate balance between efficacy and toxicity of treatments.

Sydney Morning Herald, 19/1/09, p2; West Australian, 19/1/09, p15; Age, 19/1/09, p3

Skin: Sunsafe hits home in melanoma hot-spots (NSW)

Central Coast residents face waiting lists of up to six weeks for appointments for skin cancer checks. Skin cancer clinics at Gosford and Wyong are working overtime with some doctors seeing 60 patients a day.

Central Coast Skin Cancer Clinic spokeswoman Krystle Turner said sunsafe messages were getting through, with a more diverse range of patients making appointments.

"We find more children are being checked. More parents are being extra careful, some are even bringing babies and toddlers," she said.

Daily Telegraph (Central Coast Extra), 16/1/09, p15

Skin: Sunburn victim numbers rise (SA)

Dozens of people have already been admitted to hospital with severe sunburn this summer, statistics show. There have only been a few hot days this summer, but 25 people have ended up in emergency departments – eight of them children.

Last summer 38 adults and six children were admitted to the major metropolitan hospitals.

The total is likely to be much higher because the figures do not include all hospital or GP visits, or the large number of people who treat themselves with pharmaceutical products.

Adelaide Advertiser, 16/1/09, p7

Treatment: Doctors fear shakes may hinder therapy

Doctors warned yesterday that vibrations from digging at the site of the proposed Queensland Children's Hospital may disrupt sensitive equipment delivering radiation therapy to cancer sufferers.

"It is an area of valid concern," said Lawrence Sim, spokesman for the Australasian College of Physical Scientists and Engineers in Medicine.

More than 150 cancer patients receive treatment at the Mater Hospital's radiation oncology unit each week in a building next door to the QCH site in South Brisbane.

Several buildings will be demolished, a massive hole dug for underground parking, and heavy earthmoving equipment will be in use for months.

However, experts said it was unlikely that cancer treatments would be disrupted. "The probability of disruption is fairly low," Dr Sim said. "It is unlikely that patient treatment will be compromised."

He said the linear accelerators delivering the radiation would have to be carefully monitored to be sure they were not affected by heavy vibrating rollers, diggers or pile-driving equipment.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson said the project team didn't anticipate construction work would affect health services. "As an extra measure they are installing vibration, dust and noise real-time monitoring devices before any significant construction begins."

Courier Mail, 16/1/09, p4

Obesity: Food labels to tackle obesity

Restaurants and fast food chains could be forced to reveal the calorie content of their products to help stem Australia's rising obesity rate.

The chairman of the Federal Government's Preventative Health Taskforce, Professor Rob Moodie, said the group was assessing different approaches to food labelling, including moves in the US to include the calorie content of foods on restaurant menus.

Professor Moodie said research showed Australians supported food labelling, which also encouraged manufacturers to make their products healthier.

Restaurants in the US are increasingly being forced to include the calorie content of food on menus.

The nutrition director of the New York City Health Department, Cathy Nonas, said initial surveys showed that when customers used calorie information in deciding what to order, they consumer on average 109 fewer calories.

Age, 15/1/09, p3

Treatment: Gene linked to breast cancer cells

A gene that makes breast cancer tumours more likely to resist chemotherapy and to spread to other organs has been identified by a team of researchers.

The “metastasis gene” is turned on in 30-40% of breast cancer patients. When activated, it helps the tumour cells stick tightly to blood vessels in distant organs and makes them resistant to chemotherapy drugs, according to researchers from Princeton University and the Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

Their study was published in the latest edition of *Cancer Cell*. The findings could lead to the development of a test to screen for the gene in breast tumours and medication to block the gene.

Northern Territory News, 15/1/09, p18

Detection: Hopes new breast clinic will meet demand

The ACT Government says more than 500 women have been screened for breast cancer since a new clinic opened three months ago. Health Minister Katy Gallagher hopes the clinic will help fix a dramatic fall in the number of women receiving breast screening appointments on time.

The new BreastScreen clinic at Phillip has doubled the ACT's capacity to screen women for breast cancer. Ms Gallagher said the Government aimed to screen 12,000 women a year and the Phillip clinic would be devoted solely to screening women.

Ms Gallagher acknowledged there had been a drop in the number of women who received breast screens and assessments on time. The latest ACT Health quarterly figures showed only 71% of women who sought a breast screening appointment were seen on time, compared with 93% in 2006. Only 46% of women were assessed within the recommended 28 days, compared with 75% in 2006.

Canberra Times, 14/1/09, p4

Risk: Phones cleared

Radiation from mobile phones has no short-term health impact on children and teenagers, a new German government study says. The study – which measured radiation levels in more than 3000 youngsters aged eight to 17 over a 24-hour period – showed there was no direct link between exposure to radiation and health complaints such as headaches and dizziness. Radiation might still result in longer-term health risks for children, as their nerves and immune systems were not fully developed, the Federal Office for Radiation Protection said.

Australian, 14/1/09, p10

Skin: Bulk-billing draws patients to skin clinics over GPs

Patients are choosing to visit skin cancer clinics rather than GP practices for cancer screening, because of bulk-billing and a desire for a “general skin check”, a survey says.

The reasons for the popularity of skin cancer clinics have rarely been examined. The survey of 2895 Queensland patients who had undergone a skin check in the previous 12 months suggests the popularity is not based on a perception that doctors working at skin cancer clinics have greater experience than regular GP practices.

The results of the survey, conducted in 2005, were published in a letter to the *Medical Journal of Australia* (5 January).

Only 10% of patients who visited a skin cancer clinic said they made the choice based on the doctor's experience. The most popular reasons cited were bulk-billing and a preference for a “general skin check”.

The study's authors, from Cancer Council Queensland, said: “We found that a significant proportion of the Queensland population had undergone a whole-body skin examination by a doctor within the previous 12 months and that those attending appeared to be the group most at risk of developing skin cancer.”

Australian Doctor, 16/1/09, p2

Detection: Cancer gene test stirs ethics debate

The birth of the first British baby genetically screened as an embryo to be free of a breast cancer gene has been hailed as a breakthrough by doctors but raised fresh questions about the ethics of creating so-called designer babies.

The baby girl grew from an embryo screened to ensure it did not contain the faulty BRCA1 gene, which would have meant she had a 50 to 85% chance of developing breast cancer. Paul Serhal, medical director of the assisted conception unit at the hospital, said: "This little girl will not face the spectre of developing this genetic form of breast cancer or ovarian cancer in her adult life. The lasting legacy is the eradication of the transmission of this form of cancer that has blighted these families for generations".

The technique, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, has already been used in Britain to free babies of inherited disorders such as cystic fibrosis and Huntington's disease.

Dr Sarah Cant, policy manager at Breakthrough Breast Cancer, said the decision to screen embryos for a faulty breast cancer gene was a complex, personal matter.

Critics charge that it opens the door to parents who want their offspring to be top of the class and have particular characteristics.

Sunday Age, 11/1/09, p12; *Sunday Canberra Times*, 11/1/09, p4; *Sunday Mail Brisbane*, 11/1/09, p47; *Sun Herald*, 11/1/09, p23; *Sunday Times*, 11/1/09, p41; *West Australian*, 10/1/09, p4

Nutrition: Parents snubbing junk food venues

Parents are boycotting cinemas, swimming pools and sporting events because of their junk food-laden menus, a poll suggests. And they want the government to enforce healthy guidelines in the hospitality industry.

The poll conducted by advocacy group, The Parents Jury, quizzed more than 250 about children's eating-out options. More than 60% of the parents said they were dissatisfied.

And half said they often avoided taking their children to certain venues because of the unhealthy food served.

The poll rated cinema menus of popcorn, choc-top icecreams and fizzy drinks as the worst.

Adelaide Advertiser, 12/1/09, p8; *Northern Territory News*, 12/1/09, p10; *Daily Telegraph*, 12/1/09, p2; *Canberra Times*, 12/1/09, p1; *Herald Sun*, 12/1/09, p12; *Courier Mail*, 12/1/09, p11; *Hobart Mercury*, 12/1/09, p7

Obesity: Fat linked to vitamin deficiency

Teenage girls and young women who are overweight have a higher chance of being deficient in vitamin D, scientists have found in research that strengthens the case for wider use of supplements.

The research shows that even in a sunshine-rich climate similar to Sydney's it is possible for young people to lack the essential vitamin, which the body usually produces from sun exposure.

Using scans to measure women's body fat the scientists from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, found a strong link between excessive body fat and low vitamin D levels.

The research is published in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*.

Sun Herald, 11/1/09, p13

Risk: Rift over mouth rinse and cancer

Dental health experts have locked horns over evidence of a link between mouthwash and oral cancer, with one academic saying it is more likely to prevent the disease.

Results of a review published in the *Australian Dental Journal* found there was "sufficient evidence" that "alcohol-containing mouthwashes contributed to the increased risk of development of oral cancer".

Lead author of the review Michael McCullough called for mouthwashes containing alcohol to be removed from supermarket shelves and reclassified as "prescription only".

But the head of the University of Queensland's School of Dentistry, Laurence Walsh, said yesterday that mouthwash was more likely to help prevent cancer than bring it on.

"There is a whole range of reasons why some mouth rinses would actually reduce the chance of the cancer because they impair the production of molecules that do have cancer-causing effects like acetaldehyde," Professor Walsh said. "There is literature which is now recommending that mouth rinses be used to reduce bacteria which produce acetaldehyde and there is a fairly strong consensus internationally that mouth rinses containing alcohol aren't linked to cancer."

Oncologist Andrew Dean, of Perth's St John of God Hospital in Subiaco, said oncologists would warn patients of the potential risk of using alcohol mouth washes and encourage further research in the area, as a result of the review.

Australian, 12/1/09, p3; Hobart Mercury, 12/1/09, p7; Sunday Times, 11/1/09, p1; Sunday Territorian, 11/1/09, p7; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 11/1/09, p2; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 11/1/09, p4; Sunday Telegraph, 11/1/09, p4; Sunday Times, 11/1/09, p12; Sunday Tasmanian, 11/1/09, p2

Risk: Laws call for age curbs on mobiles

New laws cracking down on children's use of mobile phones are to be introduced in France amid growing fears they may cause cancer and other diseases.

All advertising of the devices to children under 12 is to be prohibited under the legislation – announced by Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo last week – and he will also take powers to ban the sale of any phone designed to be used by those under six.

The French Government will also introduce new limits for radiation from the phones and make it compulsory for handsets to be sold with earphones, so that users can avoid irradiating their heads and brains.

Canberra Times, 12/1/09, p1

Risk: Cancer link to chemical used in pool cleaners

Pool cleaners containing a chemical banned internationally because of fears it can cause cancer and other health problems in children are being used throughout Australia.

The herbicide simazine is used in Australian pool cleaners despite being banned for use in pools in the US 15 years ago after being linked to cancer and sexual abnormalities in animals.

The Federal Government's Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority continues to allow the use of simazine for the control of algae in pools, spas, aquariums and ponds.

West Australian, 12/1/09, p11

Skin: Cancer fears for young lifesavers

Skin cancer experts have accused surf lifesaving clubs of endangering nippers' lives by failing to protect them from the sun.

The Australasian College of Skin Cancer Medicine says surf clubs are promoting dangerous beach behaviour by not forcing children to wear protective hats and vests. Clubs that hold activities in the hottest parts of the day were also exposing nippers to ultraviolet rays that could cause melanoma.

The college's Professor Anthony Dixon said that while most clubs provided children with rash vests, wearing them was not compulsory and many were short-sleeved.

Professor Dixon called for competitions to be held early in the morning or after 2pm, and for broad-brimmed hats and rash vests to be made compulsory. He said traditional nippers' caps offered inadequate protection.

Life Saving Victoria spokeswoman Paula Butler said sun protection was a priority at all competitions and the organisation tried to hold most carnivals in the morning. "We work closely with the Cancer Council to make sure we're up to date with the right advice, but the clubs are autonomous entities."

Sunday Age, 11/1/09, p7; Adelaide Advertiser, 12/1/09, p14; Daily Telegraph, 12/1/09, p3; Hobart Mercury, 12/1/09, p9

Skin: Smear campaign against suncream is 'risking lives'

Australians are risking their lives by shunning sun protection because of fears some block-out creams contain potentially dangerous chemicals, the NSW Cancer Council warns.

Several Australian academics have questioned the safety of nano-particles of zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, used in many Australian sunscreens.

Peter Dingle, an associate professor and researcher in health and the environment at Murdoch University, said chemicals used in sunscreen might cause anything from skin rashes to breast cancer.

CSIRO scientist Maxine McCall, who is researching the effects of nanoparticles in sunscreen, said there was potential for the chemicals to damage DNA. "Potentially, the nanoparticles could cause anything from changes to the chromosomes to, in the worst-case scenario, cancer," she said.

In Australia there is no requirement for sunscreen manufacturers to label their nanotechnology products. The regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, said

sunscreens with nanotechnology had been used safely in Australia since 1990 and “the risks of excessive sun exposure are well-documented and outweigh the unproven risks related to nanoparticles”.

The Cancer Council has urged people to continue using sunscreen. “Nanotechnology has been around for a long time and there have been no reports suggesting any adverse effects and no research which has determined it is unsafe or harmful,” the council’s skin cancer prevention manager Kay Coppa said.

Sun Herald, 11/1/09, p13

Tobacco: Pregnancy smokers’ new risks

Babies born to women who smoke during pregnancy are five times more likely to develop a childhood cancer, new research reveals. Smoking during pregnancy has long been known for causing birth complications but never before have scientists drawn a direct link with cancer.

The Cancer Institute NSW has found leukaemia, brain, kidney and eye cancers were common in children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy.

Babies admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit are at the greatest risk of developing cancer. They are 2.7 times more likely to develop the disease and five times at risk of kidney cancer.

The institute linked the records of all births in NSW between 1994 and 2005 with cases of cancer in children in the same period. Of the 1.05 million recorded births, there were 948 cases of childhood cancer.

Daily Telegraph, 12/1/09, p3

Treatment: Shame file on hospitals (QLD)

Cancer campaigners are developing a hospital waiting lists shame file in an attempt to cut treatment delays they say could be killing patients. People who have faced hold-ups in the states health system are being urged to contact Cancer Council Queensland’s hotline to report their experiences.

Chief executive officer Professor Jeff Dunn said the calls would be logged and presented to Health Minister Stephen Robertson. “We are very concerned that some cancer patients might have experienced a two-year wait for treatment,” said Professor Dunn.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 11/1/09, p20

Inspirational soprano dies of cancer aged 50

Australian soprano Deborah Riedel fought cancer for a decade while she continued to give opera and concert performances around the world but yesterday she lost her long battle.

Riedel died yesterday at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. She was 50.

Riedel was an ambassador for Cancer Council Australia.

Obesity: Childhood obesity epidemic a myth

The rise in childhood obesity has halted, defying warnings that it is an “epidemic” that is out of control. Obesity rates among children levelled off around 1998 and have remained steady ever since, exploding the myth that children are becoming more overweight than ever before.

Research by the University of South Australia found the alarming rise in the percentage of children who were overweight or obese recorded through the 1980s and much of the 1990s had stalled.

Timothy Olds from the SA University School of Health Sciences analysed 27 Australian studies of childhood weight status between 1985 and 2007 and found a “clear plateau” in recent obesity data.

The analysis concluded that overweight and obesity prevalence rates among children had settled at 23-24% and 5-6% respectively for the past five to 10 years.

“These findings directly contradict assertions in the published literature and the popular press that the prevalence of paediatric overweight and obesity in Australia is increasingly exponentially,” it said.

Australian, 9/1/09, p1

Public health: Tax for fat, fags, grog

The man reshaping the taxation system has been encouraged to help keep the nation healthy by making it more expensive to eat fatty foods, smoke and drink alcohol.

Treasury Secretary Ken Henry is under pressure to address the "flawed" alcohol excise and create a fat tax when he releases his discussion paper on the nation's future tax system in July.

The Rudd Government's taskforce charged with developing the National Preventative Health Strategy has urged the review to force people to live better lives by making vices too expensive. The taskforce has made a submission to the review but it has not been made public.

And, in a move that could shock smokers, the taskforce has asked for feedback on progressively increasing tax on tobacco to \$20 for a packet of 30, in some cases doubling the cost.

Courier Mail, 9/1/09, p2

Skin: Too pale, too young

Almost all South Australian tanning salons breach their own standards by letting pale people use sunbeds, research has found. An article published in last month's *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* is a damning indictment on the industry.

Using a secret shopper style survey, researchers found "extremely low compliance" with standards.

The Cancer Council South Australia survey, conducted in late 2006, found six out of 10 centres let under-aged clients in, only half asked clients to sign a consent form, and more than 9 out of 10 allowed access to fair-skinned clients.

"Given the strong evidence connecting solarium use with skin cancer risk, the low level of compliance and the increase in the number of solariums across Australia, it is clear the practices need to be markedly improved," the report says. "Further research is now required to assess whether this is effectively addressed by the new legislation."

Adelaide Advertiser, 9/1/09, p20

Risk: Put a beer on the barbie

There's a new reason why beer and a barbie go together so well: using the beverage as a marinade makes your red meat much healthier.

New Scientist magazine reports a simple marinade of beer or red wine dramatically reduces a fried or barbecued steak's cancer-causing properties.

It has long been established the high temperatures of a barbecue, frying or grilling morph the sugars and amino acids in meat's muscle tissue into a compound called heterocyclic amines (HA), which can cause cancer.

Isabel Ferreira, from the University of Porto in Portugal, marinated steak in beer or red wine for six hours. She found the beer or red wine cut the levels of two types of HA by 90%, compared with steak without marinade. Beer was more effective than red wine in reducing a third type of HA.

Hobart Mercury, 8/1/09, p5; Herald Sun, 8/1/09, p7; Adelaide Advertiser, 8/1/09, p2

Obesity: Diets fail, but few get free check-up

Almost half the adults in QLD have tried to lose weight in the last year but only one in five has been successful, according to the Dieticians Association of Australia.

The nutrition experts want the Federal Government to classify obesity as a chronic condition so overweight people can get Medicare rebates.

Five out of six eligible people have failed to get a free check-up at the doctor to help prevent chronic illness since the program was introduced more than two years ago.

The Australian Better Health Initiative was launched in July 2006 to shift the focus of the health care system towards promoting good health and reducing the burden of chronic disease.

Only 45,000 of the 300,000 eligible Queenslanders have had a check-up.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 4/1/09, p12

Tobacco: Total ban on smoking in cars: ACT Government asks for feedback

ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher has issued a discussion paper which includes a proposal to ban smoking in cars. She has asked for community feedback on the issue.

The paper contains four options to stop people smoking while driving and raises the potential problems and benefits of the plan.

These include a ban on smoking when there are children in the car or a ban when there are passengers of any age. The Government will also consider completely outlawing the use of cigarettes while driving.

The fourth option in the discussion paper is an anti-smoking education campaign, similar to drink-driving campaigns, rather than a ban or traffic fines.

The plan has drawn support from the Opposition, though health spokesman Jeremy Hanson would not say which anti-smoking option his party would support in the Assembly.

Canberrans have until February 27 to comment on the discussion paper.

Canberra Times, 3/1/09, p3

Treatment: Prostate treatment promising

Death rates among some prostate cancer patients could be halved by a new method of treating the disease, scientists say. The researchers, after using a combination of hormone treatment and radiotherapy, believe the practice could become standard.

In many patients the disease has spread outside the prostate but has not reached distant sites in the body. These are the men who would benefit from their findings, the Swedish researchers say.

Oncologists increasingly prescribe drugs for two or three years, or for life, to reduce levels of testosterone and stop the cancer growing. And although radiotherapy may be used to kill cancer cells, it is not universal practice.

The latest study combined the treatments. Researchers gave half the volunteers hormone-blocking drugs. The remainder were treated with radiotherapy followed by drugs.

After 7 years, 79 men taking hormone drugs had died of their cancer compared with 37 given drugs and radiotherapy. Those only taking the drugs were almost twice as likely to have died.

The research is published in the *Lancet*.

Hobart Mercury, 3/1/09, p40