

## **CANCER IN THE NEWS MARCH 2009**

### **Detection: Stop ignoring free bowel cancer tests, men warned**

Only one in four South Australian men is screened for bowel cancer. A free Federal Government National Bowel Cancer Screening Program began last year, but the proportion of men taking part has dropped from 43% to 26%.

Dr Matthew Lawrence from the Royal Adelaide Hospitals' Colorectal Surgical Unit says, "Each year, hundreds of South Australian men are diagnosed with bowel cancer – yet here we have a free screening program aimed at those age groups most at risk, and the number of men taking part is falling."

Cancer Council SA CEO Associate Professor Brenda Wilson said bowel cancer "is one of the most curable cancers if diagnosed early, which is why it is so important that people participate in bowel cancer screening".

"Cancer Council would like to see the National Bowel Screening Program extended, so that all people over the age of 50 receive a free testing kit in the post, every two years.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 31/3/09, p11*

### **Risk: Two more markers on road to a cure**

Australian scientists have increased the number of identifying genetic "markers" that put women at an increased risk of breast cancer.

Researchers at the University of Melbourne contributed to a study led by Cancer Research UK that has identified two further areas of the human genome known to alter breast cancer risk.

It takes the number of known breast cancer-related genetic regions to 13.

"Once researchers have an understanding of where to look, they can better focus on the genetic causes of breast cancer," the university's Director of Population Health, Professor John Hopper, said.

While the primary cause of breast cancer remains elusive, Professor Hopper says these genetic regions were "like markers on the road telling us that there is something nearby that could be important".

*Adelaide Advertiser, 31/3/09, p11; Herald Sun, 31/3/09, p19; West Australian, 31/3/09, p14*

### **Skin: DNA test can detect melanoma**

A new genetic test could help doctors distinguish more easily between malignant melanomas and benign skin moles. The test, developed by University of California scientists, is the first to spot the molecular hallmarks of killers cancers inside skin cells.

Telling melanoma apart from ordinary moles relies on microscopic examination of skin biopsies to spot cancerous cells.

The new tool uses a DNA test to monitor five genes that are overactive in melanoma cells, but not in cells from other types of mole or blemish.

The test was more than 90% successful in spotting melanoma in 693 skin samples, researchers report today in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

*West Australian, 31/3/09, p12*

### **Research: Master gene link in cancer discovery**

Combining the number-crunching power of computers with exploration of the genetic code, scientists said yesterday they had identified a cancer master gene as well as gene implicated in breast and skin tumours.

They hope the research, published by separate teams in the journal *Nature Genetics*, could open avenues to identify people at risk and, potentially, new drugs to block the mechanisms that let cancers proliferate.

British researchers said a gene called UTX, found in the X gender chromosome, played the role of ringmaster in 10% of cases of multiple myeloma and one in 12 cancers of the oesophagus.

UTX controls an enzyme that contributes to the structure of DNA in our cells. The enzyme also acts as a switch, turning other genes on or off.

Co-leader of the Cancer Genome Project at Britain's Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute Andy Futreal said, "It influences some of the most fundamental mechanisms controlling gene activity in our cells."

Researchers from the US National Institutes of Health meanwhile, said they had uncovered new insights into melanoma, the deadliest skin cancer.

They found an enzyme gene called MMP-8 was designed to suppress tumour growth and variants in the gene helped cancers to proliferate.

*Canberra Times, 30/3/09, p3; Herald Sun, 30/3/09, p26*

#### **Risk: Cancer link to hot tea**

Tea drinkers are being warned of a link between a very hot cuppa and cancer. Research published in the *British Medical Journal* found the risk of oesophageal cancer increased eightfold as a result of drinking tea hotter than 70C, suggesting boiling hot drinks should be left at least four minutes before drinking.

Previous studies suggest most people prefer to drink tea at 56C to 60C, but some like it hotter. In northern Iran, large amounts of very hot tea (at least 70C) are drunk daily.

The study notes that Golestan province has one of the highest rates of oesophageal squamous cell carcinoma in the world, but smoking and alcohol consumption rates are low.

Researchers studied the tea-drinking habits of 300 people with the cancer and a group of 571 healthy people from the same area.

*Weekend Australian, 28/3/09, p3; Daily Telegraph, 28/3/09, p5; Hobart Mercury, 28/3/09, p27; Herald Sun, 28/3/09, p3; West Australian, 28/3/09, p3; Canberra Times, 28/3/09, p1; Courier Mail, 28/3/09, p7*

#### **Risk: Toxins found in children's shampoos**

A report by a US health advocacy group has named Johnson's Baby Shampoo as one of 32 baby products found to contain small amounts of carcinogenic and allergy-producing chemicals.

The study, conducted by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, laboratory tested 48 children's products that traded on claims of being pure, natural or gentle.

More than 80% tested positive for the chemical compound formaldehyde and almost 70% for 1,4-dioxane, a contaminant linked to cancer and birth defects in animals under repeated exposure.

None of the products tested listed the contaminants on the ingredient labels because they were toxic byproducts of the manufacturing process.

Johnson's Baby Shampoo was found to contain 210 parts per million (.021) formaldehyde and 1.1 ppm 1,4-dioxane.

While the trace levels in all products tested were similarly low, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics said such dangerous byproducts had no place in infants' shampoos and soaps that were used daily, and parents were not in the position to make informed decisions because labelling of the byproducts was not required.

The report has prompted accusations of scaremongering from the US Personal Care Products Council and ACCORD Australasia, the group representing the cosmetics industry here.

The Department of Health and Ageing said it was aware of the concerns raised by the report, but the low levels of formaldehyde and 1,4-dioxane were well under the safe permissible levels.

*Sun Herald, 29/3/09, p13*

#### **Risk: Fear icing on cakes is a risk to health**

Supermarket cakes are chock-full of additives linked to hyperactivity in children and many are made with ingredients found to cause cancer and asthma attacks, a report released by consumer group Choice shows.

About one in five cakes contained the antioxidant butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA, 320), which some studies suggest may cause cancer.

*Sun Herald, 29/3/09, p8*

#### **Skin: Harsh light of day**

Employers are forcing about one in five workers to undertake outdoor jobs without adequate sun protection, a national survey reveals.

According to the National Hazard Exposure Worker Surveillance Survey – the first Australian study of its kind – about the same number of workers also complain their employer does nothing to prevent hearing damage in noisy workplaces.

The study involved 4500 workers. Most outdoor employees surveyed report they are provided with sunscreen, hats or protective clothing to prevent sun damage, while 21% say their tasks are done outside of peak UV hours to reduce sun exposure. However, almost 17% say their employer does nothing to prevent health problems caused by exposure to direct sunlight or sunburn.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 28/3/09, p2*

#### **Tobacco: Plain facts on smokes**

Young people aged 10 to 25 believe tobacco products should be sold in plain packaging. A national survey showed 69% of 800 people questioned said all cigarette advertising should go up in smoke.

Smarter Than Smoking coordinator Fiona Phillips said the results strengthened calls for the introduction of generic branding for all tobacco products.

*Sunday Times, 29/3/09, p28*

#### **Treatment: Cancer doctor banned**

A maverick doctor who exploited cancer patients by offering unproven treatments has been banned from practising for three years. The Health Practitioners Tribunal in Brisbane yesterday ruled Gold Coast doctor Michael Tait was guilty of professional misconduct by engaging in behaviour that was "discreditable to the registrant's profession".

The tribunal found Tait, 76, had breached the Medical Board of Queensland's guidelines on unconventional therapies when he gave injections of the unproven anti-cancer drug Ukrain to nearly 150 mostly terminally ill cancer sufferers.

The tribunal ordered Tait not re-register for three years.

*Weekend Australian, 28/3/09, p9*

#### **Alcohol: Alcohol a risk for prostate cancer**

Regular alcohol consumption increases the risk of prostate cancer, a meta-analysis shows, even at levels regarded as safe in recent NHMRC alcohol guidelines.

US and Australian researchers found men who drank two or more standard drinks a day had about a 20% greater chance of developing prostate cancer.

Previous studies had reported conflicting findings about the association, however when researchers pooled the results of 35 studies they found alcohol consumption was positively linked to the risk of prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer risk increased with the level of alcohol intake, and at the same age that alcohol was thought to have cardioprotective benefits, the authors said.

The research is published in *Molecular Nutrition & Food Research*.

*Medical Observer, 27/3/09, p13*

#### **Environment: Alert on cancer link to sprays**

Research has linked reproductive abnormalities, including low sperm count, and cancer to forestry pesticides used in Tasmania, two scientists have warned.

Atrazine and simazine, banned in Europe and being considered by the United States for a nation-wide ban, are commonly used in Tasmania.

Tyrone Hayes, a professor of integrative biology at the University of California at Berkeley, and Matt Landos, a specialist vet, fisheries scientist and Sydney University lecturer, met Primary Industries and Water Minister David Llewellyn and Liberal and Green politicians yesterday.

Prof Hayes said the latest research linked the chemicals to reproductive hormone imbalance and breast and prostate cancer.

"These are known endocrine disruptors, which cause hormonal disruption in animals, meaning less testosterone in men, lower sperm count and demasculinisation," he said.

"It leads to declining fertility in men and is associated with both prostate and breast cancer in laboratory rodents and in humans."

*Hobart Mercury, 27/3/09, p6*

#### **Risk: Folate a prostate cancer risk**

Supplementation with 1mg of daily folic acid could increase the risk of prostate cancer, research suggests.

Secondary analysis of a US randomised study of 643 men (mean age 57 years) found those receiving 1 mg of folate supplementation per day had almost three times the risk of developing prostate cancer compared to those on placebo.

After 10 years, 9.7% in the supplement cohort had developed prostate cancer, compared to 3.3% in the placebo group.

However, men with higher baseline dietary folate intake had a slightly lower overall risk of developing prostate cancer if they did not use multivitamins.

Dr Mark Frydenberg, associate professor of urology at Melbourne's Monash Medical Centre, said while the study only included 34 prostate cancer cases, the results suggested men shouldn't be routinely using these supplements.

"If someone's not anaemic...taking a supplement in folic acid is probably not the smartest thing in a man who's over 50 where there is a risk of prostate cancer," he said.

The research is published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

*Medical Observer, 27/3/09, p5*

### **Skin: Suntan helps stop clots**

While sun exposure has long been linked to skin cancer, a new Swedish study shows it also dramatically reduced the risk of suffering blood clots, one of the authors of the report said yesterday.

"We found that women who suntan had about 30% lower risk of suffering blood clots," said the team from the Karolinska University Hospital and Lund University.

They studied the sunning habits of 40,000 Swedish women at home or abroad.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 27/3/09, p33; Herald Sun, 27/3/09, p37*

### **Tobacco: Retailers oppose move to ban tobacco product displays at shops**

The Independent Retailers' Organisation of WA says legislation to ban the display of tobacco products is overdone and likely to put delicatessens and newsagents out of business.

A proposed Bill put before State Parliament by MP Janet Woollard aims to prohibit smoking in cars if a young person is present, in alfresco areas and ban the display of tobacco products at the point of sale.

The organisation's chief, Bob Stanton, former chairman of the Council of Small Business of Australia, said tobacco sales accounted for more than 50% of the council members' sales and a display ban could hamper business.

"It is a legal product which we can rightfully sell to adults who make the decision (to smoke)," Mr Stanton said.

*West Australian, 27/3/09, p38*

### **Tobacco: Calls to outlaw smoking in cars with kids**

The NT Government should ban smoking in cars that carry children, a prominent anti-tobacco researcher has said.

Cancer Council Victoria senior research Ron Borland said if the Territory Government wanted to cut the "huge health cost" of smoking, it would look at banning lighting up in cars when children were passengers.

Health Minister Kon Vatskalis's spokeswoman Nikola Lekias said the Government was focused on delivering its election commitments to ban smoking in pubs and clubs.

*Northern Territory News, 25/3/09, p2*

### **Research: State joins in war on cancer (QLD)**

Queensland will help lead the way in a global consortium to determine what causes the deadliest forms of cancer. Health Minister Nicola Roxon will today announce that the University of Queensland will receive \$27.5 million over five years under the International Cancer Genomics Consortium.

The consortium will involve teams in 24 countries developing detailed genetic descriptions of 50 types of cancerous tumours from 25,000 patients.

Ms Roxon will today tell the 2020 Queensland Forum on Health at the emerging Health City in Springfield that the need for collaboration for medical research was an idea from the Rudd Government's 2020 Summit last year.

She said the Government's response to the 2020 Summit would be released soon and that the new study would speed up efforts to diagnose, treat and prevent cancer.

UQ Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor David Siddle said his program would focus on pancreatic and ovarian cancer.

"By developing detailed descriptions of tumour genes, the researchers will provide information of other scientists who are seeking to tailor-make drugs that target specific tumours, instead of a range of cancers," Professor Siddle said.

UQ's Institute for Molecular Bioscience director Brandon Wainright said the "massive and coordinated" study would move closer to being able to personalise a cancer patient's treatment.

*Courier Mail, 26/3/09, p20*

#### **Risk: Blood type affects cancer risk**

People with certain blood types are at a higher risk of pancreatic cancer, according to a study published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

The study of more than 100,000 people shows those with blood type O are at significantly less risk than those with A, B, or AB.

Compared with O, type A blood increases the risk by 32%; AB by 51%, and B by 72%.

No association was shown between the Rh type, which refers to the "positive" or "negative" that characterises blood.

*Australian Financial Review, 26/3/09, p55*

#### **Tobacco: Smokers don't care about labels**

The next attempt to turn Australians off smoking should involve forcing tobacco companies to reveal cigarette ingredients, a federal government report has recommended.

But the report concedes that providing the information to consumers would not actually discourage them from smoking.

In 2000 then federal health minister Michael Wooldridge convinced the three major tobacco companies to voluntarily disclose their cigarette ingredients to allow the government to post the information online.

Late last year, the federal Department of Health and Ageing engaged the Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute to assess the public health value of disclosing cigarette ingredients and emissions data, as proposed by some health groups.

They found the one-off agreement negotiated by Dr Wooldridge was unlikely to have directly promoted or protected the health of Australians.

"In research with smokers, non-smokers, and tobacco control stakeholders, the currently disclosed emissions and ingredient information was seen to be incomprehensible, uninteresting, incomplete and difficult to access," the January 2009 report states.

"Most members of the public had not and did not intend to access the information (and) providing members of the public with the disclosed information did not seem to discourage them from smoking."

Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing Jan McLucas yesterday said the Government would await a report from the National Preventative Health Taskforce before taking any further action on smoking.

*Australian, 26/3/09, p5*

#### **Detection: Men urged to take test**

Australian men are being urged not to turn their backs on the blood test used to detect prostate cancer. The peak body for the nation's urological surgeons says a major US study into the prostate-specific antigen test was flawed, and it was wrongly undermining public confidence.

The Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand says men should continue to have the test.

*Herald Sun, 25/3/09, p20; Daily Telegraph, 25/3/09, p11*

#### **Tobacco: More quit smoking**

#### **Environment: Market gardeners blamed for cancers**

Market gardeners using vast amounts of chicken manure and pesticides on vegetable plots are being blamed for a suspected cancer cluster in a housing estate north of Perth.

People at Woodridge, about 80km north of the city, have suffered a spate of cancers and residents and local health officers are worried it is linked to poisons leaching into their groundwater supplies and soils from some market gardens in the area.

Recent testing on Woodridge bore water, which some people use as their main drinking supply, have shown nitrate levels of up to 99 parts per million – 10 times WHO guidelines. The Shire of Gingin asked the Health Department almost two years ago to investigate reports of a high incidence of cancer among Woodridge residents, warning of complaints of “skin rashes, nausea and flu-like symptoms” from people close to market gardens. A Health Department spokeswoman said there had been 34 cases of cancer between 1987 and 2008 in Woodridge but there was insufficient evidence of a cluster.  
*West Australian, 25/3/09, p11*

### **Risk: Cancer risk for lovers of red meat**

A huge new study shows people who eat the highest amounts of red meat are more likely to die from cancer and heart disease. The US research followed 500,000 men and women for 10 years, tracking what they ate.

It found those with the highest intakes of red and processed meats died at greater rates than those with the lowest red meat intakes.

Men whose red meat intake put them in the top 20% consumption band were 22% more likely to die of cancer in the 10 years of the study, compared with men whose intake was in the lowest 20%. For women, there was a 20% increase in risk.

The danger posed by processed meats was smaller: a 12% increased risk for men and 11% for women.

The analysis found that 47,976 men and 23,276 women out of the 500,000-strong study group died in the 10-year follow-up period.

The pattern was reversed for people who ate the highest amounts of fish and poultry. Men who ate the most white meat had a 16% lesser risk of dying from cancer, and an 8% risk of death from any cause. The figures for women were almost the same.

The authors of the study, published yesterday in the US journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*, said the findings meant that 11% of deaths in men, and 16% of deaths in women could be prevented if no one ate more red meat than the amount consumed by the 20% of the participants with the lowest intake.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the study was one of the largest yet to indicate the risks of a meat-heavy diet. However, he said caution was required in interpreting the results, and there was no need to avoid red meat.

One problem with the study was that the people who ate the most red meat also smoked more and were more obese – both factors that could instead have caused, or contributed to, the higher death rates.

“It’s highly likely there’s a causal association (between red meat and cancer) because meat is associated with chemicals that come out in cooking that are known to be cancer-causing,” Professor Olver said.

“It might be better to slow cook meat rather than barbeque it, in terms of the risks. You can have some red meat in your diet, but make sure you have fresh fruit, vegetables and white meat, and that you are not eating red meat all the time.”

*Australian, 25/3/09, p3; Canberra Times, 25/3/09, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 25/3/09, p3; Herald Sun, 25/3/09, p2; Courier Mail, 25/3/09, p19; Hobart Mercury, 25/3/09, p13*

### **Tobacco: More quit smoking**

Smokers across the Hunter are kicking the deadly habit, with fewer people being diagnosed with cancer and lung disease, new data shows.

A series of surveys by NSW Health reveals the number of smokers in the region has decreased by almost 50,000 in the past 10 years. Figures show there were about 160,000 adult smokers in 1997 compared with 112,000 smokers in 2007.

*Daily Telegraph (Newcastle Extra), 25/3/09, p13*

### **Prevention: The extreme choice**

More women are opting to have their breasts removed to avoid cancer. While the method may be dramatic, it is also the most effective way for women at high risk to minimise their chances of developing breast cancer.

Women with mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene have a greatly increased chance of breast cancer. A preventative mastectomy reduces the chances by about 95%.

Dr Graeme Suthers, head of SA Pathology's Familial Cancer Unit, said the decision was both big and irreversible and demanded a clear understanding of the risks. A woman's age, genes and whether or not she has children all affect the decision.

"There is no right answer. This is a woman's decision about her own body," Dr Suthers said.

"A surgical response to the risk would have to be one of the least appropriate, but it's sometimes necessary because we don't have effective screening for young women."

Professor Grantley Gill, head of the Royal Adelaide Hospital's breast unit, said more women were opting for the dramatic surgery because of the ability to now screen for the mutated genes and because of the lack of an adequate cancer screening process.

"Immediate reconstruction is also offered at the time and that's an option that many young women are choosing," he said.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 24/3/09, p7*

### **Risk: Avoiding short-term HRT 'unjustified'**

Doctors and patients are avoiding HRT despite recent evidence that short-term use early after menopause confers more benefits than risks, a leading gynaecologist says.

Dr Barry Wren, a founding member of the Australasian Menopause Society, said that reanalysis of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study showed the original conclusions were erroneous.

He believed the pendulum of opinion regarding HRT use had swung too far, and more women were avoiding it than was warranted by the data.

"Most doctors...have a concern that HRT will cause cancer," he said. "But very few have looked at the benefits and very few have read all the articles [published since WHI]."

While there was evidence that HRT increased thromboembolism risk and promoted growth of pre-existing breast cancer, benefits were likely to outweigh disadvantages if the therapy was initiated within six years of menopause, Dr Wren said.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the review highlighted the difficulty of translating findings from population studies into blanket clinical recommendations.

*Medical Observer, 20/3/09, p6*

### **Tobacco: Global tobacco toll**

Tobacco kills about six million people annually and drains up to \$500 billion from the world economy, according to the latest version of the *Tobacco Atlas*.

Published by the World Lung Foundation and the American Cancer Society, the third version of the atlas reveals the burden of premature death, lost productivity and misused resources from tobacco use was being increasingly borne by the poorest nations.

By 2010, about 72% of worldwide deaths resulting from tobacco use would be in low- and middle-income countries, it was estimated.

The atlas also says cigarettes are the world's most widely smuggled legal consumer product with about 600 billion illegally making it to market in 2006.

The atlas can be accessed online at [www.tobaccoatlas.org](http://www.tobaccoatlas.org). *Medical Observer, 20/3/09, p18*

### **Treatment: Cancer drug rule provokes outrage**

Cancer patients will be given "left-over" chemotherapy drugs under a Rudd Government budget-saving measure.

Australia will become the first country in the world to "reuse" opened cancer drug vials, sparking criticism from Queensland doctors and patient groups.

The Intravenous Chemotherapy Supply Program plan will start from July and will save the Government \$105 million over four years.

Wesley Medical Centre doctor and Private Cancer Physicians of Australia president John Bashford said patient safety could not be guaranteed under the initiative because the Therapeutic Goods Administration had not provided advice on reusing vials.

"There is no current universal accepted shelf life for open vials from a microbiological point of view...as this really depends on facility standards and local quality assurance practices," he said.

A spokesman for Health Minister Nicola Roxon denied cancer patients would be affected.

"The TGA...supports multiple dosing from chemotherapy vials (and) it is just not accurate to suggest pharmacists will be forced into unsafely using left-over vials," the spokesman said.

Patient group Cancer Voices Australian executive officer John Stubbs accused the Government of hiding the measure in last year's Budget. He has written to Ms Roxon to

express his concerns over the potential for incorrect dosages, plus the possibility of bacterial and viral infections.

"We believe that the cost-saving measure is based on a flawed notion that leftovers can be safely used," he said.

*Courier Mail, 24/3/09, p3*

### **Detection: Prostate cancer blood test does little to decrease death rate**

A popular blood test to detect early signs of prostate cancer does not save lives and causes many men to undergo needless surgery, according to the most definitive research yet into the controversial issue.

Radical prostate surgery has risen massively in Australia since the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test received government funding, meaning many more cases were identified early. But two new studies – from Europe and the United States – suggest that, on average, men do not stand to live longer by entering a formal program of screening tests and subsequent treatment, mainly because the cancers picked up may be less aggressive tumours that would not have killed them before they died of a different cause.

CEO of Cancer Council Australia Professor Ian Olver, said the results of the long-awaited studies gave no weight to arguments for universal PSA screening, along the lines of the BreastScreen Program – as some groups have advocated.

The US trial of PSA testing in 77,000 men concluded there was, "no decrease in the death rate" in those who had yearly tests compared to those who were not formally offered annual testing.

The European trial, which involved 182,000 men, identified "a modest decrease [in deaths] at the expense of over-diagnoses and over-treatment" of many more men, Professor Olver said. The study found 1410 men would have to undergo tests – and 48 of them have prostate surgery – in order to prevent a single death.

Nearly twice as many cancers were found in the screened men, compared with the unscreened group.

Both studies were published yesterday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Professor Olver said men needed to think about the implications of a positive result before deciding whether to have a PSA test, which now appeared to be unsuitable for screening the whole population.

Researchers would need to focus instead on finding new markers, such as high-risk genes, to identify men whose cancer was more dangerous.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 20/3/09, p7; West Australian, 20/3/09, p3; Canberra Times, 20/3/09, p5*

### **Public health: Higher death rate in Tassie**

Tasmanians continue to die at a rate 16% higher than the national average, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2007 figures show.

Cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death in Australia – 34% - followed by cancer which accounted for 29%.

Tasmanian Director of Public Health Roscoe Taylor said Tasmanians were still trailing the nation and the gap was not shrinking. "The standardised death rate nationally is 595.2 per 100,000 people, but in Tassie it's 691.2, significantly higher than the national average," he said.

Dr Taylor said poor diet, smoking, alcohol, drugs, lack of exercise and social exclusion contributed to ailments that killed Tasmanians needlessly.

*Hobart Mercury, 20/3/09, p9*

### **Tobacco: Smokers targeted**

Tobacco companies are in double trouble from anti-smoking groups over the sale of twin packs. Major cigarette manufacturers were accused of using marketing tactics to "super-size" products.

Cancer Council NSW said cigarette manufacturers and major retailers had combined to promote bulk buying by offering discounts on mini-cartons.

"As fast as one loophole is closed, the tobacco companies find another one," Cancer Council spokeswoman Wendy Oakes said. "What the tobacco company is doing is not illegal but is designed to entice young people to buy bulk cigarettes."

*Daily Telegraph, 20/3/09, p5*

**Treatment: Cancer hope**

Frankincense, an aromatic tree oil, may be a helpful treatment for bladder cancer, a new study shows. US scientists tested an enriched extract of the frankincense herb *boswellia carteri* on both human bladder cancer cells and normal bladder cells and the oil suppressed cancer growth and activated mechanisms that kill the dangerous cells.

*Herald Sun, 20/3/09, p4*

**Detection: Screening possible for ovarian cancer**

Annual CA 125 tests and follow-up transvaginal ultrasounds may be a feasible ovarian cancer screening method, a study finds. The strategy was as sensitive as transvaginal ultrasound alone, but more specific, a large randomised trial found.

It resulted in fewer repeat tests and almost nine times fewer operations than ultrasound, researchers reported in the *Lancet Oncology* (online).

Of the almost 100,000 postmenopausal women screened, 97 in the CA 125-based screening group had surgery, compared with 845 in the ultrasound-based group.

The higher overall rates of surgery in the ultrasound group reflected the high prevalence of benign adnexal lesions and the method's lower specificity, the authors said.

Overall, 19% of primary ovarian cancers detected by CA 125-based screening were classed as "borderline cancers", a specific variant of ovarian cancer, compared with 44% in the ultrasound-alone group, they said.

*Australian Doctor, 20/3/09, p10*

**Obesity: Obesity as bad as smoking, say health experts**

Being obese can take years off your life and in some cases may be as dangerous as smoking, a new study has found.

British researchers at the University of Oxford analysed 57 studies, mostly in Europe and North America, following nearly one million people for an average of 10 to 15 years. During that time, about 100,000 of those people died.

Researchers found that deaths rates were lowest in people who had a BMI of 23 to 24.

The study, published online by the *Lancet*, was paid for by the Medical Research Council, the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK and others.

Gary Whitlock, the Oxford University epidemiologist who led the study, said, that obese people were two thirds more likely to die of a heart attack or stroke, and up to four times more likely to die of diabetes, kidney or liver problems. They were one sixth more likely to die of cancer.

*West Australian, 19/3/09, p28*

**Prevention: Keep cancer away: tea up a bunch of fungi**

Mushrooms and green tea could be the simplest way for women to reduce their risk of breast cancer. An Australian study has sought to determine the protective qualities of the traditional diet in China, where the incidence of the cancer is up to five times lower than in Western countries.

Min Zhang, of the University of Western Australia, looked at differences across the diets of more than 2000 Chinese women, half of whom had the cancer.

He found mushrooms were the key and eating as little as 10g, or less than one button mushroom, daily could protect against breast cancer.

Women who consumed the most fresh mushrooms were about two-thirds less likely to develop breast cancer, compared with those who did not eat mushrooms.

There was also reduced incidence of the cancer among women who drank green tea, according to the research published in the *International Journal of Cancer*.

Commenting on the research, WA dietician and healthy eating specialist Glenn Cardwell said it supported earlier studies which showed how natural compounds in mushrooms could inhibit breast cancer growth.

*Canberra Times, 19/3/09, p3; Adelaide Advertiser, 19/3/09, p22; Northern Territory News, 19/3/09, p23; Herald Sun, 19/3/09, p29; Age, 19/3/09, p2; Daily Telegraph, 19/3/09, p9; Hobart Mercury, 19/3/09, p3*

**Skin: Discovery may alter melanoma treatment**

The discovery of field cells that are sometimes present in apparently normal skin surrounding primary melanomas could change the way melanomas are removed.

These field cells are genetically melanoma cells, the recent annual Hawaii Dermatology Seminar was told.

A study has shown these cells extend a mean of 6.1mm beyond the margins of a non-invasive melanoma and 4.5mm beyond the margins of an invasive melanoma.

This was noteworthy because surgeons often use 5mm margins in removing non-invasive melanomas.

*Australian Financial Review, 19/3/09, p58*

### **Support: Safety net threat for cancer care**

Cancer patients and couples struggling to have a family could lose valuable taxpayer-funded subsidies under a plan to means-test the Medicare Safety Net.

The controversial overhaul of health funding is being considered by the Federal Government's razor gang in a desperate bid to slash spending in a looming horror May Budget.

Amid growing speculation about the cuts, Queensland doctors and cancer, heart and IVF patients throughout Australia have launched a campaign urging Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his Cabinet not to proceed.

Under the scheme, taxpayers can claim 80% of their out-of-pocket medical expenses once they have spent \$1111 in a year for a range of doctors visits and test, including specialist consultations, ultrasounds, pap smears, blood tests, CT scans and X-rays.

But figures show more than half the money handed out goes straight to obstetricians and gynaecologists, with the scheme growing seven times faster than the inflation rate in 2007.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday refused to confirm or deny that the Government would means-test the Medicare Safety Net or remove the eligibility of some services under it.

*Courier Mail, 19/3/09, p1*

### **Tobacco: Tobacco ban leaves mental health groups fuming**

A ban on smoking in all psychiatric facilities will go ahead despite vehement opposition from some members of the mental health community, who argue that strict anti-smoking rules will destabilise acutely ill patients and put staff at risk of violence.

NSW Health has ordered all facilities, including emergency psychiatric centres, to close designated outdoor smoking areas, confiscate tobacco products and supply free nicotine replacement therapy to staff and patients.

Anti-smoking groups say the department's decision to enforce its longstanding smoke-free policy in wards that had been granted an exemption will help to break down the "deep-rooted smoking culture" among mental health staff and patients.

The new guidelines will be implemented over at least six months to give workers, patients and visitors time to adjust and, ideally, to quit their habit, with the help of counselling and anti-smoking aids such as patches and pharmacotherapy.

The director of NSW Health's Centre for Health Advancement, Liz Develin, acknowledged there was widespread hostility to the ban but said research in Britain, Canada and other Australian states showed careful planning and education can lower levels of patient distress.

CEO of Cancer Council NSW, Andrew Penman, said arguments that people with psychiatric disorders smoke to self-medicate or relieve symptoms, stress and anxiety "are too easily used as excuses to justify inaction about smoking".

A spokesman for the Mental Health Council of Australia, Simon Tatz, said forcing a nicotine addict to endure withdrawal symptoms while battling an acute episode of mental illness may impose a disproportionate level of suffering on people who were already suffering enough.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 19/3/09, p1*

### **Detection: Cancer screening saves lives**

A national screening program for bowel cancer saves lives and money, according to new Victorian data. But Cancer Council Victoria says the program's limited reach – only one in 10 of Australians at most risk of the disease – is indefensible.

Data collected by Biogrid Australia indicated that in Victoria the test nearly tripled the number of cancers detected at their earliest stage of development, when almost all patients can be cured and treatment is least expensive.

More than 40% of colorectal cancers detected by the screening program were at stage A, which has an 88% survival rate and the average treatment costs \$25,000.

Professor David Hill, director of Cancer Council Victoria, said screening was a good investment, and saved lives. The new statistics proved the argument, he said.  
*Age, 18/3/09, p13*

#### **Environment: Work, cancer link**

Victorian women who suffer breast cancer after working extended night-shift could be entitled to compensation after a landmark overseas ruling.

Almost 40 air cabin crew, nurses and soldiers won payouts from the Danish government after the World Health Organisation ruled working at night might have caused the disease. Prolonged night shifts were rated just one rung below asbestos and smoking in the list of potential cancer triggers, and equal to anabolic steroids, ultraviolet radiation and diesel fumes.

But Australian cancer experts say the link is not strong enough to spur a public health campaign.

Professor Bernard Stewart, scientific adviser to Cancer Council Australia, said while smoking raised the risk of lung cancer by 20 times, working night shift for 20 years had been shown to almost double a woman's risk of breast cancer.

"Studies mainly in nurses and, to a lesser extent, in flight attendants have shown increased risk of cancer, as have studies in experimental animals," he said.

The Danish government is the first in the world to classify breast cancer among shiftworkers as an industrial injury.

*Herald Sun, 18/3/09, p22*

#### **Prevention: A quarter of bowel cancers preventable**

One in four cases of bowel cancer in Britain could be prevented by 2024 through eating less red meat, increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables and taking more exercise, Cancer Research UK has found.

About 12,000 cases of the disease could be prevented over the next 15 years by adopting healthier lifestyles, researchers have calculated.

About one-third of cases in men and almost one-fifth in women can be prevented with improved health.

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of health information, said: "There are many practical things we can all do on a daily basis that will help reduce our bowel cancer risk. Eating sensibly, limiting alcohol, taking exercise and keeping a healthy weight all contribute to this."

The research is published in the *European Journal of Cancer Prevention*.

*West Australian, 18/3/09, p34*

#### **Risk: Iron levels linked to bowel cancer**

The number of people tested as part of Australia's bowel cancer screening program could be widened after research showed high iron levels in the blood can treble the risk of the cancer. WA researchers have been awarded a \$140,000 grant from Cancer Council WA to investigate why people with the inherited blood disorder haemochromatosis are two to three times more likely to develop bowel cancer.

While doctors have known that the disease also increases the risk of diabetes, heart failure and liver disease, the link to bowel cancer has only been made recently by another Australian study.

Now a University of WA study led by Associate Professor Debbie Trinder will focus on whether it is genetics or high iron levels in people with haemochromatosis that increases their risk of developing bowel cancer.

One of the chief investigators, Professor John Olynyk, said his team believed there was now enough evidence to recommend that haemochromatosis patients over 50 discuss bowel cancer screening with their doctor.

The study could also influence screening recommendations to include people with haemochromatosis.

*West Australian, 18/3/09, p16*

#### **Tobacco: Outdoor smokes risk exposed**

Sitting at an outdoor cafe where two or more people are smoking exposes people to dangerously high levels of airborne particles, a series of landmark tests in Perth has revealed.

Using a machine from the US, anti-tobacco lobbyists found that while one smoker in an alfresco area was enough to endanger people who were sensitive to respiratory allergens, having two or more smokers raised airborne particles to levels which the US Environmental Protection Agency says is a health risk to children, seniors and anyone with a heart or lung condition.

The SidePak machine also showed having a cigarette lit for just one minute in a car boosted the airborne particle level to five times the amount considered hazardous.

When a second cigarette was lit after 10 minutes, the airborne particle level in the car rose to 70 times the base hazardous level.

The tests were commissioned by the Australian Council on Smoking and Health and carried out at 28 cafes and pubs in Perth suburbs as well as in the rear passenger seat of a hatchback car.

Council president and Curtin University professor of health policy Mike Daube said the data underlined the importance of protecting non-smokers from second-hand smoke.

Professor Daube said ACOSH would send the results to State MPs who are considering MLA Janet Woollard's tobacco control legislation.

*West Australian, 18/3/09, p45*

### **Alcohol: Prostate cancer link to alcohol**

Men who drink two or more alcoholic drinks a day are 20% more likely to get prostate cancer, the first research to link the two has found. The risk is likely to confuse Australian men who have previously been told that one to two drinks a day, particularly of red wine, can protect them from heart disease.

But researchers from the National Drug Research Institute said a review of 35 studies on alcohol and its link to prostate cancer showed the risk increased for men the more they drank. "We found that at one drink a day the risk was not significant but at two standard drinks, middle-aged men had about a 20% greater chance of developing prostate cancer. For four drinks a day, the chance was 25% higher and for six standard drinks a day, the risk was about 35% higher," said Associate Professor Tanya Chikritzhs, an author of the study.

Professor Chikritzhs said previous research into the link had either concluded there was no effect or that the outcomes were too mixed. She said men who are confused about balancing the risks and the stated benefits of alcohol should err on the side of caution.

"I would advise men to follow the newly advised National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines and stick to less than two standard drinks per day," she said.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 14/3/09, p7; Age, 14/3/09, p7; Daily Telegraph, 14/3/09, p11; Hobart Mercury, 14/3/09, p9; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 15/11/09, p11; West Australian, 14/3/09, p16*

### **Detection: Cancer test to cut toll**

WA research will cut the number of people dying from bowel cancer. A new test has been developed that identifies bowel cancers caused by a hereditary form of the disease, known as Lynch syndrome.

The study has already found 13 WA families who were previously unaware they carried a potentially deadly gene.

During the study, more than 1200 tumours from bowel cancer patients aged under 60 were tested for indications of Lynch syndrome.

Genetic Services WA Familial Cancer Program director Jack Goldblatt said the research project had changed clinical practice in WA. "Previously the first we'd see of these patients was when they presented with bowel cancer, which was often at a late stage and difficult to treat," he said. "Now we have the capacity to identify virtually all the bowel cancer patients who have inherited forms of bowel cancer before it becomes a problem."

Cancer Council WA research director Terry Slevin said the work was an important strategy in finding WA families at higher risk of bowel cancer.

*Sunday Times, 15/3/09, p24*

### **Detection: Govt owes cancer doc \$1m**

A radiologist has cancelled vital breast screenings for women because he is owed more than \$1 million by NSW Health.

James Mullins, who runs the radiology department at Albury Base Hospital, has also warned non-essential surgery could be postponed because he has had to scale back services.

Dr Mullins is waiting for \$900,000 overdue beyond the 45-day benchmark.

“What we’ve had to do is try to decrease our costs. This week, we cancelled a breast-screening assessment clinic and we might have to postpone it again”.  
*Sunday Telegraph, 15/3/09, p2*

### **Detection: National approach needed on gene tests: pathologists**

Access to the rapidly growing number of genetic tests varies enormously across Australia, leaving many patients unable to take advantage of potentially life-saving diagnoses and treatment, a new report has found.

Genetic experts say the health system cannot keep up with demand by patients for the expanding number of predictive and personalised tests that is dramatically altering mainstream medicine.

Many tests now determine a patient’s suitability for a therapy. The results can lead to a reduction in the number of drugs prescribed, avoiding unnecessary side effects.

But genetic testing is “uncoordinated, inequitable and inefficient,” the president of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, Bev Rowbotham, said yesterday at the college’s annual conferences in Sydney.

The chairman of the college’s genetics advisory committee, Graeme Suthers, said that by 2007 the diversity of tests offered had increased 8%, the number of assays rose 67% but the stark variations remained as to which tests were offered where.

The college has called for a National Genetics Framework to provide equitable access to testing, deal with the workforce shortage and provide counselling for predictive testing patients.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 14/3/09, p8*

### **Environment: Cancer cluster fears**

A suspected cancer cluster at Sydney International Airport could be related to powerful X-ray machinery used by Customs officers.

An expert inquiry was ordered last week after three women who worked at Customs were found to have been diagnosed with breast cancer since 2006. Anecdotally, a further three cases, one fatal, may be linked to the cluster.

Customs Officers Association of Australia president Peter Bennett said he was contacted by at least three staff concerned for their health.

“Those X-ray machines are extremely powerful. It is very important the terms of reference of the inquiry look at what areas these women used to work in, to see if there is any link there.”

*Sunday Telegraph, 15/3/09, p17; Daily Telegraph, 14/3/09, p11*

### **Obesity: Health risks increase as newborns get heavier**

Babies in NSW are being born up to 21% bigger than they were two decades ago, putting a generation at an increased risk of developing asthma, diabetes and cancers of the blood, prostate, breast and colon later in life.

Almost one in six boys and one in 10 girls now weighs more than four kilograms at birth due to a sharp drop in the number of women smoking during pregnancy and a rise in maternal age and cases of gestational diabetes.

But experts fear the trend could lead to a generation of children whose life expectancies plunge as they battle obesity-related illnesses from birth.

An analysis of more than 1.2 million births in NSW between 1990 and 2005 found the proportion of babies born large for their gestational age had increased by 18% for boys and 21% for girls over 16 years.

Researchers at the University of Sydney and Royal North Shore Hospital studied NSW Midwives Data Collection reports on babies born after 37 weeks gestation and found mean birth weight had increased 23 grams for boys and 25 grams for girls.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 16/3/09, p2; Herald Sun, 16/3/09, p7; West Australian, 16/3/09, p18*

### **Prevention: Parents urged to get daughters immunised**

Health experts are urging parents to allow their school-aged daughters to have a free cervical cancer vaccine in an effort to improve on the 30% refusal rate in last year’s free immunisation program.

The WA Health Department and the Immunisation Alliance said yesterday that this year’s vaccination campaign for Year 7 schoolgirls had started and thousands of students would be offered the three-injection course of Gardasil over six months.

*West Australian, 14/3/09, p15*

### **Public health: Hunter's grim tally**

Startling evidence has revealed the death rate from prostate cancer in the Hunter region is among the worst in the state. The prevalence of the disease has prompted a new medical facility to tackle the problem, by focusing on research, treatment and public awareness of the illness.

The Hunter Prostate Cancer Centre will begin operating today, which is a joint venture between the Hunter Prostate Cancer Alliance and the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group's prostate cancer trials.

The centre will coordinate a series of extensive research projects in a bid to identify contributing factors for the disease as well as treatments to cure it.

*Daily Telegraph, 16/3/09, p13 (Newcastle Extra)*

### **Skin: Tanning drug a health risk**

Tanning addicts are injecting themselves with a new drug that darkens their skin. Melanotan II, also known as the "Barbie drug", is available to buy online and is growing in popularity as an alternative to spray tans and self-tanning lotions.

But medical authorities warn it could lead to more people developing skin cancer and cause heart and blood-pressure problems.

The drug is not approved for use in Australia. The Federal Government is being urged to block websites which offer the product.

Melbourne skin cancer specialist Dr Paul Jenkinson said the synthetic hormone worked by artificially prompting the skin's natural pigment-producing cells, known as melanocytes, to be stimulated. The more pigments that are produced, the deeper the tan.

Dr Jenkinson warned Melanotan was a dangerous option. "It's known to cause side effects including raised blood pressure, heart disease".

*Sunday Mail Brisbane, 15/3/09, p34; Sunday Telegraph, 15/3/09, p24; Sunday Tasmanian, 15/3/09, p13; Sunday Herald Sun, 15/3/09, p27*

### **Research: new testicular cancer clue**

Male factor infertility and testicular cancer may have a common underlying aetiology, according to a new study.

Californian researchers used data from 51,461 couples evaluated for infertility to link 22,562 male partners to the California Cancer Registry.

They found that men seeking infertility treatment had a 30% higher risk of developing testicular cancer compared with men in the general population. Those with defined male factor infertility had a nearly three times higher risk of testicular cancer.

The authors said it was unlikely the infertility treatment itself caused testicular cancer. "A more plausible explanation is that a common exposure underlies infertility and testicular cancer," they said. (*Arch Intern Med* 2009;169:351-56.)

*Medical Observer, 13/3/09, p16*

### **Research: new findings lift ovarian cancer hope**

In twin research findings that raise new hope in the fight against ovarian cancer, doctors say they are closer to being able to offer a routine screening test and improved treatment for those who have the disease.

The biggest trial of ovarian cancer screening techniques, involving 200,000 British women, showed that 90% of cancers can be detected by combining two currently available tests. The dual approach involves a blood test that looks for the protein marker CA125 and an ultrasound that can pick up abnormalities in the ovaries.

In the United Kingdom Collaborative Trial of Ovarian Cancer Screening, published in the journal *Lancet Oncology*, half the women received no treatment, a quarter had both the CA125 screening and trans-vaginal ultrasound and a quarter had ultrasound alone. While ultrasound detected 75% of ovarian cancers, the combined screening picked up 90%, half of them in the early stages when they had not spread far and were more treatable.

But doctors said more work was needed to see if the screening methods reduced the death rate from ovarian cancer.

In a separate breakthrough, Melbourne doctors yesterday revealed a radical approach in the treatment of ovarian cancer using very low dose chemotherapy tablets that enable the body's

own immune system to fight the cancer.

The Women's Cancer Foundation's ovarian cancer unit said the findings could revolutionise how cancer was treated because it was effective with far fewer side effects.

Professor Michael Quinn said the new approach, immune modulation, blocked the cells that were inadvertently created by the immune system when it was fighting off cancer. "We know that women with solid cancers mount immune responses to fight it but we've never known why it not wholly effective in eradicating it, and we've found a group of inhibitor cells that stop antibodies being effective," he said. "These inhibitor cells that stop the immune system working effectively cycle every 10 to 14 days. We've determined that if we can knock off these inhibitors it will allow the body to work for itself."

*West Australian, 12/3/09, p9; Herald Sun, 12/3/09, p7*

#### **Alcohol: Women, wine and cancer risk**

Women who drink two glasses a day of wine increase their risk of breast cancer by almost a quarter, regardless of whether they drink shiraz or semillion.

The biggest study ever to look at the role of red wine versus white wine in breast cancer development has found no difference between the two beverages.

American researchers interviewed almost 14,000 women aged 20 to 69, almost half of whom had breast cancer, detailing how much alcohol they consumed as well as other breast cancer risk factors such as age, family history and use of hormone replacement therapy.

Results published in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention* showed women who had 14 alcohol drinks a week, or two a day, regardless of the type, increased their risk of breast cancer by 24%.

*West Australian, 11/3/09, p7*

#### **Treatment: New cancer treatment shows promise**

Melbourne scientists could be on the verge of a better treatment for cancer, after the success of early trials. A team from the Royal Women's Hospital cancer unit is working on ways to time chemotherapy to match the natural cycle in the patient's immune system.

This could dramatically boost its effectiveness, and allow doctors to use a less toxic dose.

An initial trial led to an excellent response in three patients with very advanced melanoma, said researcher and Women's Cancer Foundation board member, Professor Michael Quinn.

"One person is still in remission 18 months later," he said. This week the group has started a new phase of the trial, using the technique for women with less far advanced ovarian cancer.

*Age, 11/3/09, p10*

#### **Prevention: Cancer vaccine makes 1300 ill (international)**

More than 1300 schoolgirls have experienced adverse reactions to the controversial cervical cancer jab. Doctors have reported that girls aged 12 and 13 have suffered paralysis, suffered convulsions and sight problems after being given the vaccine.

Dozens were described as having pain "in extremity" while others suffered from nausea, muscle weakness, fever, dizziness and numbness.

The vaccine, which is a cheaper alternative to the Gardasil vaccine used in Australia, is being given to British girls under a Government program to prevent women from developing cervical cancer.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 10/3/09, p24*

#### **Public health: Australians refused insurance because of poor genes**

Australians have been refused insurance protection because of their genetic makeup, researchers have shown in the first study in the world to provide proof of genetic discrimination. Most cases were found to relate to life insurance.

In one instance, a man with a faulty gene linked to a greater risk of breast and prostate cancer was denied income protection and trauma insurance that would have let him claim if he developed other forms of cancer.

The findings have led to renewed calls by experts for policies to ensure the appropriate use of genetic test results by the insurance industry.

The director of the Centre for Genetics Education at Royal North Shore Hospital, Kristine Barlow-Stewart, said the research also showed consumers needed to be better informed about their rights.

Associate Professor Barlow-Stewart and her colleagues surveyed more than 1000 people who had attended clinical genetic services about their experiences of discrimination. An expert assessment panel should be established to advise on which tests are sufficiently well understood to be used for insurance purposes, she said. Under industry guidelines, insurers cannot compel people to have a genetic test, but those who have been tested must reveal their results. It is only legal for companies to use this information if they can justify their decisions.  
*Sydney Morning Herald, 10/3/09, p1*

#### **Research: Rudd's \$1b cure for medical research**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is to approve a \$1 billion rollout for a network of medical research units across Sydney in what would make the city the world's research capital. Sources in Canberra claim Mr Rudd was "disposed" to a \$1 billion submission from NSW Health for funding of eight medical research institutes across Sydney. If approved, it would create one of the largest networks of hi-tech biomedical research facilities of any city and would start to reverse a decade-long brain drain of the nation's top medical researchers. An announcement on the plan is expected before the end of the month when a list of projects to be funded around the nation from the Federal Government's \$10 billion health and hospital fund is finalised.  
*Daily Telegraph, 10/3/09, p10*

#### **Treatment: Red tape delays lifesaving drug**

More than 350 bowel cancer patients a month are dying as they wait for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to approve a subsidy for a \$55,000 drug that may extend their life. Eight months ago the Federal Government's expert medicines advisory body approved a subsidy for the cancer drug Avastin, which costs \$55,000 a year. The decision should have cut the cost of this medicine to just \$32.90 for general patients and \$5.30 for pensioners. But before the subsidies can be paid Cabinet must rubber stamp the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee ruling because the subsidy for the drug will cost taxpayers more than \$10 million a year. In the eight months since the drug was approved for subsidy 1600 patients who could have had their lives extended for five months by the drug have missed out. Just 305 patients have been able to afford the \$20,000 they need to go on to a special scheme in which Roche, the drug's manufacturer, helps patients with the cost of the drug. A spokesman for Health Minister Nicola Roxon said yesterday he could not comment on when Cabinet might consider the drug.  
*Daily Telegraph, 10/3/09, p7; Hobart Mercury, 10/3/09, p2; Courier Mail, 10/3/09, p6; Herald Sun, 10/3/09, p19*

#### **Alcohol: Two drinks less risky but not safe**

Two alcoholic drinks a day – the maximum recommended on a regular basis under new national health guidelines – put people at greater risk of death from alcohol than from drowning, being in a pedestrian accident or accidental fall. The long-awaited guidelines released on Friday by Australia's top health advice body, warn that the health benefits of alcohol have been overstated, and that someone consuming two drinks a day has nearly one chance in 100 of dying from alcohol-induced injury or illness. World-first modelling of the health risks of alcohol shows that above two drinks a day, the dangers escalate quickly – taking drinkers closer to better-recognised dangers such as car crashes (one in 54), cancer (one in four) and heart disease (one in four). The guidelines, published by the National Health and Medical Research Council, also recommend that adults drink no more than four drinks on any occasion. Children and young people under 18, women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, and breastfeeding mothers, are all advised to avoid alcohol altogether. Cancer Council Australia said it would have preferred the daily drinking limit for women to be halved again, to one drink. Jon Currie, chairman of the NHMRC committee that compiled the new advice, said the guidelines were "not telling you what you can and can't do", but were instead designed to help Australians make informed choices about health risks.

*Weekend Australian, 7/3/09, p7; Adelaide Advertiser, 7/3/09, p3; Canberra Times, 7/3/09, p1*

**Obesity: WA will wage war on obesity**

Parents will be told to stop over-feeding their children in a WA Government blitz on obesity. WA Health Minister Kim Hames is also pushing for a national plan on junk food ads during televised sport and children's prime-time TV.

Dr Hames said he was in discussions with the Health Department to get an advertising campaign launched within the year, telling parents to put less food on their children's plates because of the growing obesity crisis.

Dr Hames said of the planned local ad campaign: "We need to educate people that bigger isn't better. Having more food doesn't make a healthy child. In fact, it makes for a less healthy child."

*Sunday Times, 8/3/09, p4*

**Research: Cancer funding (VIC)**

The State Government has announced 46 cancer grants totalling \$6.8 million. The biggest, \$900,000, goes towards clinical trials at Cancer Trials Australia.

The money will go towards improving the experiences of cancer patients as well as research and prevention.

*Sunday Herald Sun, 8/3/09, p25*

**Treatment: Hope on cancer in kids**

Scientists have moved closer in their fight against childhood brain cancer, with the discovery of genes that cause tumours. In the largest study of its kind, researchers looked at more than 200 tumours from children all over the world.

They discovered that in healthy children, eight individual genes worked together and triggered a protein in the developing brain that told it to stop growing.

But these genes are mutated in children with brain tumours, causing their brains to grow out of control, leading to cancer.

Michael Taylor and his team at the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute spent more than three years studying medulloblastoma – the most common type of brain tumour in children.

Paul Northcott, a researcher at the Cancer Institute, said, "We've learnt more from this study about the genetic basis of this disease than from any other previous study."

The findings are published in the journal *Nature Genetics*.

*Sunday Times, 8/3/09, p26*

**Treatment: One-stop breast clinic**

A one-stop shop for breast cancer patients planned for north-western Sydney will care for women from diagnosis to post-surgery. The clinic at Macquarie University could open as early as November.

The university and the Sydney Breast Cancer Clinic are talking about building the centre, the first of its kind in NSW.

The university plans to open the 183-bed, \$180 million facility in partnership with Dalcross Private Hospital.

*Daily Telegraph, 9/3/09, p12*

**Alcohol: Call to ban TV booze advertising**

A group of experts has called for alcohol advertising to be banned on television, particularly during sport, after research showed it encouraged young people to drink.

The Alcohol Policy Coalition – a group of health agencies including the Australia Drug Foundation and Cancer Council Victoria – has also demanded tougher rules for sponsorship of sporting events and teams in Australia.

A US study published in the journal *Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* tracked the behaviour of more than 6000 youths over several years and concluded those with alcohol-branded merchandise, such as T-shirts and hats, were up to twice as likely to engage in risky drinking during their teens.

A separate study published in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism* this week found that people aged 18 to 29 who watched films and advertising in which alcohol drinking featured prominently reached for a drink immediately if it was available to them.

The coalition's call for action comes as the National Health and Medical Research Council is expected to recommend today that children under 18 abstain from drinking altogether to protect their health. It is also expected to conclude that adults are putting themselves at serious risk if they drink more than four drinks in one session.

Coalition spokesman Craig Sinclair said the US research showed deliberate marketing by alcohol companies was having a detrimental effect on the drinking behaviour of young people. Mr Sinclair said the sponsorship of sporting events and clubs also meant young people were inundated with marketing on television, at stadiums, and even in pictures of players wearing uniforms with alcohol company logos on them.

*Age, 6/3/09, p3*

### **Skin: Campaigner honoured**

Skin cancer campaigner Clare Oliver is one of 20 women added to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. The list recognises the achievements of women across diverse fields and is announced each year in celebration of International Women's Day.

*Age, 6/3/09, p2*

### **Support: Cancer patients refused benefits**

Centrelink refused to pay sickness allowance to a man dying from cancer because he had set aside money to pay for his funeral and some work debts.

The welfare agency also denied the disability pension to a woman with advanced leukaemia because there was a chance she might recover.

The cases of "Mr A" and "Mrs B" are exposed in a Commonwealth Ombudsman report that examines how public servants assess claims from severely ill or dying patients.

The Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, said the examples were among many that highlighted the problems that occurred when social security law was applied strictly.

"People can face onerous activity and/or reporting requirements for Newstart, youth or sickness allowances, during a time that is already difficult for them and their families," he said yesterday.

His report recommends a new benefit for patients who require lengthy treatment or recovery periods, and a list of severe conditions that would automatically qualify them for the payment. But one of the agencies involved in welfare policy, the Employment Department, refused to endorse the recommendation, saying it would cost too much.

*Canberra Times, 6/3/09, p1*

### **Prevention: Immunity vaccine a 'medical marvel'**

In a breakthrough that could revolutionise humanity's relationship with illness and disease, a method of vaccination has been developed that provides instant immunity, US researchers announced on Monday.

The new approach has the potential to give humans spontaneous protection against diseases caused by viruses, bacteria, toxins and even cancerous cells, they said.

In methods developed by the California-based Scripps Research Institute, a two-stage process targets specific cells and creates a "universal" immune reaction.

Mice were injected with one type of chemical antibodies to trigger a programmable reaction, and another type of chemical described as "adapter" molecules recognise the right cells to target. The two work in sync to self-assemble inside the body to create an instant result.

Team leader Carlos Barbas said, "The advantage of this method is that it opens up the possibility of having antibodies primed and ready to go in the time it takes to receive an injection or swallow a pill.

*Northern Territory News, 5/3/09, p18*

### **Support: Poor health an employment risk**

While people who survive cancer are more likely to be unemployed than those who have never had cancer, an analysis of 36 studies has shown this is not the case for prostate, testicular or blood cancers.

Published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the analysis showed that breast and gastrointestinal cancers were associated with unemployment as were cancers of the blood.

Unemployment in survivors appeared to be a product of poor health and disability.

*Australian Financial Review, 5/3/09, p58*

### **Tobacco: US bill seeks to regulate tobacco (international)**

The US Congress is poised to regulate tobacco, in what appears to be the best chance since public health groups started pushing for regulation in the 1970s.

Proposed legislation before the House Commerce and Energy Committee would place tobacco under the control of the Food and Drug Administration. The bill would restrict the ways tobacco companies marketed cigarettes, require them to disclose the ingredients in their products and place larger warning labels on packages.

It would also give the FDA the authority to require removal of harmful chemicals and additives from cigarettes.

*Age, 5/3/09, p13*

### **Treatment: New light on organ regrowth**

Australian scientists have made a breakthrough in stem cell research which raises the prospect of regrowing damaged sections of a person's liver, pancreas or even their brain.

Researchers at the University of NSW have found a way to improve the lifespan and competitiveness of stem cells, overcoming a problem which otherwise saw regenerative powers fade in about an hour.

Adult stem cells were given a gene to make them resistant to chemotherapy, handing them an "advantage" when used to treat damaged tissue in conjunction with the cancer-fighting treatment.

University of NSW Professor Peter Gunning said as the chemotherapy cleaned out damaged cells, resistant stem cells were left to complete their process of turning into healthy replacements, thereby restoring the tissue.

"The beauty of this technique is that chemotherapy makes space for stem cells coming into muscle and also gives the stem cells an advantage over the locals."

The research is published in the journal *Stem Cells*.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 5/3/09, p24; Canberra Times, 5/3/09, p; Hobart Mercury, 5/3/09, p13*

### **Risk: school's cancer all-clear**

Radiation from powerlines and other sources at Hobart's Hazelwood School was low and similar to other schools, public health director Roscoe Taylor said yesterday.

Dr Taylor met staff and parents of the Moonah school after investigations into cancers among past and present staff.

There were 19 cases over 29 years among 263 staff, compared with an expected 11.4 cases in the general Tasmania population, allowing for age and sex. The Hazelwood cases reduced to only 13 if staff who worked there less than one month were excluded. Dr Taylor said 19 cases barely rated as statistically significant and 13 cases was not statistically significant at all.

"Tacking into account the lack of identifiable hazards, as well as the very small population we are dealing with, the most probable explanation for the numbers of cancers appears to be chance variation," he said. "This was a rigorous and thorough investigation and while we probably can't provide staff with the absolute assurances and certainty they would have been looking for, the results of the analysis mean we can be fairly confident there has been no serious threat to public or occupational health at the school."

*Hobart Mercury, 4/3/09, p16*

### **Skin: green cream to beat cancer**

Eating plenty of leafy greens has long been hailed as a weapon against cancer. Soon slapping them on your face could be another way to fight it.

Scientists say sunscreen based on compounds found in cabbage or broccoli could one day prevent the deadliest form of skin cancer.

They have already used the vegetable compounds to create a drug that slows the growth of malignant melanoma.

*Herald Sun, 4/3/09, p24*

**Tobacco control: more seek help**

Graphic warnings on cigarette packets are convincing more people to seek help to give up smoking, a support group says.

Calls to QuitSA's Quitline have doubled since the introduction of the warnings two years ago, with almost 165,000 calls recorded.

QuitSA manager David Edwards said getting the warnings on the packets was a major step forward for tobacco control.

"Cigarette packaging is the strongest selling point for the product, so regulation of packaging was a huge win for us," he said.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 4/3/09, p2*

**Treatment: 5000 left without cancer treatment**

Cancer patients are being denied lifesaving treatment, with State and Federal Government "buck passing" blamed for leaving up to 5000 people a year without radiotherapy.

In some parts of the state, dying patients are being forced to pay up to \$8000 through private radiotherapy units or wait up to two months for a public facility because the State Government is under investing in equipment and services. At the same time the Federal Government is permitting private units to have a monopoly in rural areas.

Cancer Council NSW has slammed the governments for placing patients' lives at risk. Today it will hold a call-in for patients to describe their horror stories so a database can be compiled to lobby governments.

Chief executive officer Dr Andrew Penman said some people were foregoing the treatment because it was too costly. "There is a Medicare coverage but it doesn't pay the full cost if you go private," he said. "Some patients are waiting longer than the 21 days recommended to start treatment. Radiotherapy prolongs survival."

NSW only has 42 machines to treat the 19,000 cases a year that require radiotherapy, but the Cancer Council claims at least 5000 are missing out because of lack of machines and exorbitant private fees.

The Cancer Council wants the Government to provide at least 20 radiotherapy units by 2011. The Cancer Council's radiotherapy call-in will be held all this month.

*Daily Telegraph, 3/3/09, p3*

**Treatment: new CT machine speeds treatment**

A new \$1.1 million CT scanning machine will let Royal Adelaide Hospital doctors detect changes in patients' metabolisms before symptoms like tumours become visible.

RAH general manager Lindsey Gough said new technology in the scanner produced a single, all-encompassing image much faster than older scanners, reducing discomfort to patients and allowing the hospital to treat more people.

"The system allows us to pinpoint the site of cancer, cardiac abnormalities and orthopaedic problems and concentrate the treatment with greater accuracy," Mr Gough said.

A new \$1.2 million patient monitoring system for the hospital's Intensive Care Unit will also help doctors provide patients with the most up-to-date care available.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 3/3/09, p8*

**Public health: key to the cancer crisis**

More than 40% of breast and bowel cancer cases in rich countries are preventable through diet, physical activity and weight control alone. Simple measures such as cycling to work and swapping fatty foods for daily fruit and vegetables can make all the difference between getting these killer cancers and many others, or living cancer-free, the World Cancer Research Fund reports.

The key message in the release of landmark cancer-prevention guidelines is that, after not smoking, diet, physical activity and weight management is the best way to prevent millions of preventable cancer cases globally.

"This report shows that by making relatively straightforward changes, we could significantly reduce the number of cancer cases around the world," said panel chair Professor Sir Michael Marmot.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 28/2/09, p40; Age, 28/2/09, p3; Sunday Herald Sun, 1/3/09, p35*

**Public health: new health drive**

Men are the target of a series of health campaigns to be launched this week aimed at preventing disease and getting them to take action when they notice something wrong. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners will launch the M5 Project on Thursday - an initiative to decrease the number of men who die every hour from potentially preventable illnesses from five to zero.

"There's a huge health deficit there that needs to be addressed," the college president Dr Chris Mitchell said. "Issues around smoking, alcohol, activity: these are the things that drive death rates and illness and need to be addressed," he said.

The Cancer Council is also launching a campaign highlighting that 60 men die each day in Australia from cancer. "It's been more difficult to get the message across to men and there has been more emphasis on women's health," Cancer Council Australia president Professor Ian Olver said.

*Sunday Telegraph, 1/3/09, p33; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 1/3/09, p46*

### **Public health: Senate urged to hold firm on alcopops tax**

Australia's leading health experts will launch a national campaign calling on the Senate to ensure alcopops remain costly - a move they say will protect teenagers from the "irretrievable" brain damage, injury and mental illness the controversial drinks cause. In a newspaper advertisement to run nationally, 21 leading public health specialists will call on the Senate to ignore liquor industry propaganda and instead pass a bill to keep a 70% tax increase on alcopops to price them out of the reach of teenagers.

The heads of the Cancer Council, Public Health Association of Australia and VicHealth are among those to put their names to the statement, which will run ahead of the Senate vote next month.

It comes as new figures show Australians consume more of the sweet, alcoholic, pre-packaged beverages than drinkers in any other developed country.

The health experts also accuse the industry of deliberately targeting underage drinkers and urged senators to "put aside political differences and vote on the basis of sound research evidence rather than liquor industry propaganda."

*Sunday Age, 1/3/09, p7*

### **Research: \$15m centre for research**

A \$15 million research centre to promote the state's push to become a health and medical research powerhouse has been opened at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The centre, incorporating the Basil Hetzel Institute for Medical Research, marks the halfway mark in the hospital's \$127 million second stage of redevelopment.

Premier Mike Rann, who opened the centre yesterday, said it would allow about 130 health and medical researchers to investigate some of the most serious health conditions, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, kidney disease, diabetes, respiratory disease and stroke.

*Adelaide Advertiser, 2/3/09, p24; AAP Newswire, 1/3/09*

### **Risk: black tea 'cuts risk of cancer'**

Drinking tea can cut the risk of ovarian cancer by up to a third, researchers have said. A study found women drinking at least two cups a day of black tea had a 30% drop in risk. It is thought antioxidant compounds found in tea catechin and theanine contribute to improved blood vessel function.

The study was carried out in the US with 414 women, half of whom had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

The findings were released in the *International Journal of Gynaecological Cancer* before the start of this month, which is dedicated to ovarian cancer.

Dr Catherine Hood, from the industry-backed Tea Advisory Panel, said an earlier Swedish study involving more than 61,000 women made similar findings. It showed that those who drank two or more cups of tea daily had a 46% lower risk of the disease compared with those who never or rarely drank tea.

*Sunday Mail Brisbane, 1/3/09, p22; Sunday Times, 1/3/09, p26*

### **Tobacco control: ACT outlaws tobacco machines (ACT)**

Australia's strictest tobacco laws are now in place in the ACT. The Tobacco Amendment Act 2008, which further restricts the promotion of the tobacco products, including the banning of

vending machines in pubs and clubs, came into effect yesterday.

The ACT Government was also considering further reforms including banning smoking in cars carrying children. "The new laws demonstrate the Government's commitment to further minimising tobacco promotion and, in so doing, reducing demand and most importantly, to ensure non-smokers are protected from the harmful effects of second hand smoke," Minister for Health Katy Gallagher said.

QUIT executive director Fiona Sharkey commended the ACT for leading the pack with the new reforms and as the first state or territory to remove vending machines from licensed venues. "Anything that discourages the purchase of cigarettes is to be congratulated and measures such as restricting retailer rewards are vital for the anti-smoking message," she said.

*Sunday Canberra Times, 1/3/09, p3*

### **Tobacco control: Gasper you'll never light up**

With its slim white body and glowing amber tip, it can easily pass as a regular cigarette. But the Ruyan V8, which produces a nicotine-infused mist absorbed directly into the lungs, is just one of a growing array of electronic cigarettes attracting attention in China, the US and elsewhere - and world health scrutiny.

Billed as a healthier alternative to smoking and a potential way to kick the habit, the smokeless smokes have been distributed in swag bags at the British film awards and at an international trade show.

Because there's no burning involved, makers say there's no hazardous cocktail of cancer causing chemicals and gases like those produced by a regular cigarette. There's no second hand smoke, so they can be used in places where cigarettes are banned, the makers say. But in Australia the sale of electronic cigarettes containing nicotine is banned and other health authorities are questioning claims that they are safe.

The World Health Organisation issued a statement last year warning there was no evidence to prove that e-cigarettes are a safe substitute.

*Sunday Telegraph, 1/3/09, p40; Sunday Mail Brisbane, 1/3/09, p50 2009*

*Cancer in the News is produced by Cancer Council Australia and is an edited summary of news items in daily national and capital city newspapers. It is aimed at keeping Cancer Council staff and stakeholders up-to-date on issues relating to cancer and does not necessarily represent the views of Cancer Council Australia*