

CANCER IN THE NEWS OCTOBER 2008

Treatment: Melbourne scientists hit on cancer treatment

Melbourne scientists hope that a world-first combination drug therapy will revolutionise the treatment of cancer.

Scientists at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research have found that drug-resistant melanoma and colon cancer cells can be successfully treated using a combination of two new drugs.

Using mice, scientists combined a cancer inhibitor – a drug that slows the growth of cancer cells – with a drug that harnesses the body's cell-killing machinery to induce the death of the cancer cells.

Cancerous melanoma and colon carcinoma cells survive because the body's internal mechanism for killing cancer cells – known as apoptosis – can no longer counteract dangerous mutations.

Dr Clare Scott, who along with Professor Andreas Strasser and Dr Mark Cragg led the research team, said scientists hoped the entire treatment might be orally delivered sparing some patients the pain of chemotherapy.

"The combination (of drugs) is much less toxic because it can be given in low doses", Dr Scott said.

Scientists hope to introduce human clinical trials of the combination therapy in several years, after each drug undergoes several levels of separate trials.

Age, 31/10/08, p9; Herald Sun, 31/10/08, p3

Detection: \$400,000 payout in BreastScreen ruling

BreastScreen patients who get letters stating their mammograms show "no visible evidence of breast cancer" cannot be sure they are risk-free until they see a GP or have an ultrasound, a court has found.

In a "controversial and far-reaching" case, Christine Anne O'Gorman was awarded almost \$406,000 damages in the Supreme Court yesterday after she sued BreastScreen NSW – an arm of the Sydney South West Area Health Service – for failing to diagnose a cancerous tumour that spread to her lungs and brain.

Ms O'Gorman, who is terminally ill, had mammograms every two years from 1994 at BreastScreen but radiologists failed to detect that a lump in her left breast had almost doubled in size between her 2004 and 2006 scans, Justice Clifton Hoeben found.

In his judgement, Justice Hoeben said a letter from BreastScreen was not enough for women to rely on.

Justice Hoeben found that, had radiologists compared Ms O'Gorman's 2004 and 2006 scans, the change would have been detected and would have prompted further tests.

Outside court, Ms O'Gorman said she did not want her negative experience with BreastScreen to discourage women from having their breasts checked regularly through the service.

Daily Telegraph, 30/10/08, p23; Sydney Morning Herald, 30/10/08, p3; West Australian, 30/10/08, p5

Detection: New test a big step in ovarian cancer fight

Australian women have been given access to the world's first test which finds "fingerprints" of deadly ovarian cancer while the disease is still in its early stages.

Known as OvPlex, the test was developed in Melbourne and has been shown to be more than 90% accurate in picking up five proteins which point to the presence of ovarian cancer cells.

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

The test, developed by scientists from HealthLinx and ARL Pathology, is available in Melbourne this week and will soon be available in other states.

Dr Helen Zorbas, of the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, said the big breakthrough would be when there was a test that could screen all women, and more research was needed to see if current tests were suitable for this.

"There are currently a number of tests in development worldwide to detect ovarian cancer in its early stages through the presence of protein biomarkers in the blood, and OvPlex is one of these tests being marketed for use in the diagnostic setting." *West Australian, 30/10/08, p3*

Tobacco: Rees put brake on smoke bans (NSW)

Nathan Rees has been dubbed the key man behind what was criticised as a soft approach by the former Carr government to introducing bans on smoking in hotels.

The recently retired head of the Australian Hotels Association, John Thorpe, dropped the bombshell at a farewell celebration in his honour, thanking the Premier for being an architect of the controversial delay in a full smoking ban in hotels.

The chief executive of ASH, Anne Jones, confirmed Mr Rees played a central part in establishing a staged ban which bitterly disappointed anti-smoking advocates.

Sydney Morning Herald, 30/10/08, p2

Detection: Australia needs genetic test plan: doctors

The provision of genetic testing in Australia is "uncoordinated and inefficient", say doctors who are calling on the Federal Government to speed up the introduction of new tests on Medicare and to develop a national system for allocating the most complex tests between a network of laboratories in state public hospitals.

Gene tests had been added to Medicare at the rate of only about one every two years for the past decade, said Dr Beverley Rowbotham, the president of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia. This led to anomalies that adversely affected treatment.

A new approach should involve assessing the basic technologies used to carry out gene tests, so that tests for particular disorders did not have to be evaluated individually.

Sally Crossing, the chairwoman of Cancer Voices NSW, said genetic testing to determine the best course of treatment would save money by avoiding the trial-and-error approach to cancer medication.

Sydney Morning Herald, 29/10/08, p3

Prevention: Prostate trial halted over disease risk

Men in a trial to determine whether vitamin E and selenium prevent prostate cancer have been told to stop taking the supplements because they do not work and could increase the risk of cancer and diabetes.

The National Cancer Institute, an arm of the US Government, is taking the unusual step of writing to 35,000 middle-aged men in the US, Canada and Puerto Rico telling them that there is no evidence that the vitamins they have been taking for the study do anything to ward off prostate cancer.

Researchers also said that there had been two "concerning trends", with a slightly increased risk of prostate cancer in men taking only vitamin E and a similar increase in type 2 diabetes cases in men taking selenium only.

But they cautioned that because the finding was based on a preliminary analysis of data, it did not prove the supplements posed any danger to men and the apparent increased risk of prostate cancer and diabetes might be due to chance.

West Australian, 29/10/08, p15; Hobart Mercury, 29/10/08, p20

Public health: Cancer sufferers urged to have a say (TAS)

Tasmanians affected by cancer are being urged to have their say and help shape future service delivery. Health Minister Lara Giddings yesterday told State Parliament that a series of public forums would be held across the state by the Tasmanian Cancer Network Development Program in a bid to ensure all affected by cancer were included in the planning process.

Ms Giddings said the feedback would then be used to establish a consumer group to link with the new Clinical Network.

Hobart Mercury, 29/10/08, p13

Treatment: Doctors alarmed at fertility crime checks (VIC)

Cancer sufferers will be among people denied fertility help until they pass criminal history checks, doctors say of a proposed overhaul of state laws.

Doctors fear the delay caused by this, and checks on child protection orders, could ruin any chance cancer patients may have to conceive.

IVF Directors Group spokesman Rick Forbes said the proposed Assisted Reproductive Treatment Bill would prevent doctors harvesting a cancer patient's eggs until the checks were conducted.

Treatment such as chemotherapy could diminish a woman's chances to conceive, making it imperative for her eggs to be harvested before treatment began.

"Many patients will be forced into a time frame to not only cope with cancer, but a situation where your chance of having children is almost gone", Mr Forbes said.

Premier John Brumby said yesterday the requirement for such checks was in the best interests of the child.

Herald Sun, 29/10/08, p5

Detection: PM cites mother's cancer struggle

Kevin Rudd has honoured his mother's courage in fighting breast cancer, and urged young women to check themselves for the disease.

Lending his support to the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre's Pink Ribbon Breakfast in Sydney yesterday, the Prime Minister said his mother Margaret had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1963.

The centre's Cheeky Check-up campaign is targeted at young women, who are often confused about how to conduct breast checks.

Centre director Dr Helen Zorbas said young women did not need to learn complicated techniques to check themselves, but they did need to check regularly to pick up any changes to their breasts early.

"It is particularly important for young women to be aware of breast changes, because mammographic screening is not effective at finding breast cancer in its early stages in this age group," she said.

The deaths of Jane McGrath and Belinda Emmett from breast cancer are driving more young women to seek out mammograms, despite the scans bringing no benefit to females aged under 40, experts have warned.

The so-called "Kylie effect" remains around the disease, with overblown public perception of rising rates of breast cancer in younger women and confusion around the best way to detect it.

"It is important to dispel the misconceptions, address unnecessary alarm and provide the facts for this age group," Dr Zorbas said.

She said women under 40 made up just 6% of the 12,000 females diagnosed with the disease, and rates remained static.

Australian, 28/10/08, p3; Northern Territory News, 28/10/08, p9; Age, 28/10/08, p9; Daily Telegraph, 28/10/08, p8; Herald Sun, 28/10/08, p9

Tobacco: It's a smoke you can drink

Smokers may soon be pouring themselves a glass because of a new drink that claims to deliver the same fix as cigarettes. "Liquid Smoking" promises an instant high followed by a "calming feeling".

The drink is targeted at those who can no longer light up inside public premises but still crave a fag.

Cancer Council NSW tobacco control manager Wendy Oakes said the drink – planned for release in the UK – would have to be approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration before it hit pubs and clubs locally.

The drink is said to contain a mix of South African roots, and is nicotine free.

Daily Telegraph, 28/10/08, p7

Nutrition: GM food, content labels study

State and Federal governments have promised an independent review of food labelling laws to revisit the "traffic light" system of labelling for salt, sugar and fat content.

The review was agreed to in principle at the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council in Adelaide on Friday.

West Australian, 27/10/08, p4;

Nutrition: Experts reject self-regulation and call for junk food ad ban

Health advocates have urged the Government to introduce a blanket ban on junk food advertisements for children, after the industry published a plan to self-regulate the ads.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council launched a "responsible children's marketing initiative on Friday, telling a House of Representatives obesity inquiry that the industry wanted to be part of the solution.

Public Health Association of Australia chief executive Michael Moore said it was a long-overdue concession and a tentative step.

Canberra Times, 25/10/08, p8; Hobart Mercury, 25/10/08, p4

Nutrition: Fruit and veg boost for chemo

Eating fruit and vegetables can improve the effect of chemotherapy on cancer patients, according to a new study into drug resistance.

The research suggests a new, natural alternative to chemotherapy could be found in foods including apples, cherries, grapes and even tea and wine.

The research, published online in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* this week, isolated the effect of apigenin on p53, a protein that ensures cells with damaged DNA are killed.

Daily Telegraph, 25/10/08, p17; Adelaide Advertiser, 25/10/08, p52; Courier Mail, 25/10/08, p2; Hobart Mercury, 25/10/08, p15

Prevention: Purple tomato power

Scientists have grown genetically engineered purple tomatoes in a bid to promote healthy food. The tomatoes include two genes taken from the snapdragon flower to enable them to express a compound called anthocyanin, the purple pigment found in blackberries and cranberries.

Previous research has found that anthocyanins offer protection against certain cancers, cardiovascular disease and degenerative diseases.

The study is published online today by *Nature Biotechnology*.

Herald Sun, 27/10/08, p9; West Australian, 27/10/08, p7; Adelaide Advertiser, 27/10/08, p26

Tobacco: Doctors push to give smokers free vaccines

A vaccination to protect against a tobacco-related disease should be freely available to people who smoke, the Australian Medical Association says.

An influential United States Government panel recommended this week that smokers receive the pneumococcal vaccine to protect against bacteria that causes illnesses such as meningitis and pneumonia.

The chairman of the AMA's council of general practice, Rod Pearce, said the vaccine should be freely available to people at risk of contracting the disease, which included smokers.

Canberra Times, 25/10/08, p7

Treatment: Funding for cancer scan left in limbo

More than half the patients with advanced cancer have had their treatment plans altered after undergoing a sophisticated form of body scan, Australian doctors have established in the most compelling evidence yet in favour of positron emission tomography.

But Federal Government funding for PET – which costs about \$900 a scan – remains in limbo. Interim Medicare arrangements, due to have expired in June, have been extended until 2010 – limiting access to adult patients at a handful of hospitals, and restricting the forms of cancer in which it may be used.

Specialist doctors say they still do not know whether PET scans will be on the Medicare schedule when it is revised next month.

Sydney Morning Herald, 27/10/08, p4

Nutrition: Kids TV junk-food ad ban

The nation's largest food and drink manufacturers only will be able to advertise "healthy" food on television during peak children's viewing hours from next January 1.

Some of Australia's biggest food companies today will move to address community concern about the prevalence of junk-food advertising directed at children.

Under a Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative to be announced by the Australian Food and Grocery Council, companies only will be allowed to advertise "healthy dietary choices" in TV shows targeted at children aged less than 12.

The initiative will apply to all media, including advertising in schools and will outlaw the use of such licensed characters as Shrek and the Wiggles.

The scheme will be overseen by an independent arbitrator, who will be able to investigate perceived breaches and take action to rectify violations.

Australian Food and Grocery Council chief executive Kate Carnell said, "It will be a name-

and-shame approach. Companies that continue to advertise would have to produce scientific evidence their product was healthy and argue their case "in the court of public opinion". The proposal will be outlined in the council's submission to the Australian Communications and Media Authority draft report on Children's Television Standards.
Adelaide Advertiser, 24/10/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 24/10/08, p5

Nutrition: Red meat gets the chop in cancer fight

West Australians should limit how much red meat they put on the barbeque this summer and instead opt for more fish and chicken to lower their risk of bowel cancer, a British public health expert has warned.

Teresa Norat, from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Imperial College in London, said yesterday that people should avoid having meat more than a few times a week, or more than about 500g.

Speaking at the Cancer Council WA's State Cancer Conference, Dr Norat said there was strong evidence that too much meat increased the risk of bowel cancer, and limited research suggested it also raised the risk of stomach and breast cancers.

The Cancer Council recommends moderate amounts of 65-100g of unprocessed lean red meat three to four times a week.

West Australian, 24/10/08, p11

Tobacco: Tobacco poised for sporting comeback (NSW)

The State Government is exploring ways to bypass federal tobacco advertising bans and allow tobacco companies to sponsor high-profile sport.

A clause allowing tobacco brands to sponsor horse, motor and greyhound racing in NSW has been inserted into anti-tobacco legislation in the past two days.

Tobacco experts say NSW could circumvent federal legislation which does not ban sport sponsorship but rather the advertising that promotes a brand's association with a sporting code.

There was confusion over whether the federal legislation would override the act. A federal health spokeswoman seemed confident its legislation would not be compromised by the NSW bill: "It would not appear to open any new avenues for tobacco advertising in connection with various sporting or racing activities."

Sydney Morning Herald, 24/10/08, p3

Detection: Labs ordered to stop breast cancer tests

Women will no longer be able to go to a public hospital to find out whether they have inherited a genetic mutation that causes breast cancer, after the company that holds the licence to the gene patents set a deadline of November 6 for other laboratories to cease testing.

This would force testing for the genes into Genetic Technologies Ltd's own Melbourne laboratory, at \$2100 per test.

The controversial move marks the first time in Australia that a company has enforced its proprietary rights over the human body's genetic code, which some argue is inherently publicly owned.

The Liberal Senator Bill Heffernan said yesterday the move would stifle research and increase health care costs.

Luigi Palombi, an expert in patent law at the Australian National University, said state or federal governments could allow laboratories to continue testing under a crown-use provision in the Patents Act, but he was unaware of this ever being used.

Sydney Morning Herald, 23/10/08, p1; Age, 23/10/08, p3

Prevention: Is there nothing that NSAIDs can't do?

NSAIDs reduce the risk of breast cancer, a study has suggested, although an Australian expert says it is unlikely they would be sued solely as preventative agents.

The use of any NSAIDs was associated with a 12% reduced risk for breast cancer compared with women who did not take the drugs, according to a metaanalysis published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* which involved more than 2.7 million women.

Aspirin was associated with a 13% reduced risk and ibuprofen showed a 21% reduced risk.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the fact the studies all pointed to an association between NSAIDs and breast cancer prevention was a positive result. "It's a small effect relatively and there are other cancer preventative strategies for high risk women such

as tamoxifen and raloxifene, but the uptake of those has been fairly slow.”
Australian Doctor, 17/10/08, p4

Prevention: Preventative effect of tamoxifen clarified

Tamoxifen does not reduce the incidence of oestrogen receptor-negative breast cancer in high-risk women, a study has found, but may lead to the earlier detection of such tumours by one year.

The median time to diagnosis of oestrogen receptor-negative tumours was 24 months in high-risk women who took tamoxifen for prophylaxis. This compared with 36 months in the control group.

Research is published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Australian Doctor, 17/10/08, p4

Public health: Cancer service faces cutback (NSW)

The State Government is red-faced after a confidential memo revealed it wants to cut cancer research funding by \$6 million. A leaked briefing, obtained by the Opposition, has exposed the Government's desperate attempts to claw back a \$300 million deficit in the health budget. The NSW Cancer Institute has been asked to find ways to slash \$6 million in recurrent funding. It could mean cancelling planned tobacco prevention plans and shedding staff.

The Government last night defended its position, saying it would not cut the institute's funding. A spokeswoman for Assisting Minister for Health (Cancer) Tony Stewart said there would be no amalgamation of the institute's services with NSW Health.

Daily Telegraph, 23/10/08, p9; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23/10/08, p9

Research: Scientists grow complete prostate from single stemcell

In an extraordinary case of medical DIY, scientists have grown a complete prostate from a single stemcell.

The research was aimed at understanding how solid organs develop and what goes awry in cancer, but the result could lead to organs being grown from scratch to replace lost ones.

The prostate, grown by American researchers in mice, is the second organ to be produced this way. The first was a breast grown from a stemcell in mice in 2006 by a team of Australian researchers of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne.

The US research is published in the journal *Nature*.

West Australian, 23/10/08, p5; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23/10/08, p2

Risk: Chronic hep B linked to pancreatic cancer risk

Past exposure to hepatitis B has been linked to the development of pancreatic cancer in a novel study finding. US researchers found in a case control study of more than 1200 participants that patients with pancreatic cancer were twice as likely as healthy subjects to have had hepatitis B infection.

The researchers, from the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston, also found that the risk was increased seven-fold among patients with a history of both hepatitis B exposure and diabetes.

Professor Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia, said the study suggested one possible aetiology for pancreatic cancer and, if confirmed, might impact on therapy. “Just as we are cautious about reactivating hepatitis B in patients with liver disease, perhaps we should be cautious about giving chemotherapy to patients with pancreatic cancer, because it may reactivate the hep B infection”, he said.

Research is published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

Medical Observer, 10/10/08, p3

Skin: Anti-sun protection media coverage rising

Australian skin cancer experts are raising concerns over the growth in news coverage featuring anti-sun protection spokespeople commenting on controversial issues such as vitamin D intake.

Research conducted by Cancer Council Victoria involved an analysis of 547 news reports on sun protection issues published in *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* from 1993 to 2006 has revealed the emerging trend.

It showed that, although the majority of articles featured a pro-sun protection commentator, 12% featured an anti-sun protection spokesperson who supported solarium use or sun

exposure to obtain sufficient vitamin D levels.
Reportage of vitamin D intake issues increased from 19% in 2004 to 24% in 2005.
Research is published in *Australia New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.
Medical Observer, 17/10/08, p17

Tobacco: Pre-quit patch sparks debate

New pre-quit patches designed to wean smokers off nicotine have sparked debate, with an expert warning it unnecessarily increases smoker's dependence on pharmacological help. Professor Nick Zwar from the University of NSW said pre-quit aids made quitting less daunting. However Professor Simon Chapman from Sydney University's school of public health claimed the new products clouded the fact that most people who quit smoking did so unaided.

Australian Doctor, 17/10/08, p4

Treatment: Gene identification points way to new drugs for lung cancer

Scientists have identified 26 genes for the most common form of lung cancer, raising hopes that new drugs could be found to treat the disease. An international research team studied hundreds of different genes in 188 samples of adenocarcinoma, the most widespread lung cancer type.

The genes they identified all have significant mutation rates in tumour cells but not in healthy cells, suggesting they contribute to cancer progression.

Understanding the genetic basis of lung cancer could help improve patients' prospects, said Richard Wilson, of Washington University School of Medicine, who led the study.

The research is published in the journal *Nature*.

West Australian, 23/10/08, p13

Risk: Spotlight on shift work link to cancer

WA women with breast cancer will be studied to test a theory that abnormal sleeping patterns caused by shift work could contribute to growing rates of the disease.

Associate Professor Lin Fritschi, from the WA Institute for Medical Research, will head a \$776,975 study funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council to see if shift work is contributing to the one in eight women diagnosed with breast cancer over their lifetime.

She said studies in mice suggested that changes to the body's circadian rhythm or wake-sleep pattern caused by shift work increased the risk of hormone-dependent diseases such as breast and prostate cancers.

Professor Fritschi said the International Agency for Research in Cancer had determined that shift work was a probable human carcinogen. She said there had not been any good studies involving people.

West Australian, 22/10/08, p13

Obesity: Gutsy ads not aired in Victoria

An obesity prevention campaign asking Australians to measure their waistlines will not be promoted in Victoria after a fallout between state and federal governments over its effectiveness.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon last week launched the national obesity campaign *Measure Up*, which asks people to measure their waists regularly.

But Victorians will see the ads only in national newspapers and on SBS because the State Government is unwilling to be associated with the campaign.

State and territory governments contributed \$10 million towards the \$30 million campaign.

Victoria's decision not to provide about \$3 million has led Ms Roxon to refuse to promote the campaign through Victorian television or newspapers.

Age, 21/10/08, p3

Public health: Doctors demand money to fight virus

Health groups will make a joint plea today for federal funds to curb the spread of hepatitis B, a virus that affects up to 160,000 Australians.

The Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, Cancer Council, Gastroenterological Society of Australia and Hepatitis Australia warn more money is urgently needed to draw up a national strategy to deal with the disease.

Cancer Council NSW chief executive Dr Andrew Penman backed the call. "Hepatitis B is one of the leading causes of liver cancer and the longer we wait for the Commonwealth Government to take action, the more Australians we expose to the risk of liver cancer", he said.

Canberra Times, 21/10/08, p3

Detection: Genetic test breaks new ground in fight against prostate cancer

A simple urine test for a newly found genetic marker of prostate cancer could help diagnose some men more accurately while avoiding the need for repeat biopsies, doctors say.

A paper in the journal *European Urology* this week said the prostate cancer gene-3 test, or PCA2, was a highly specific marker for the male cancer and showed promise for detecting the disease early.

Researchers found the PCA3 gene was noticeable in more than 95% of cancerous prostate tissue compared with normal tissue in the gland, making it a highly accurate marker which could complement a PSA test.

The researchers, led by the University Clinic Hamburg in Germany, said the PCA3 test could help check for cancer in men with high PSA levels without expensive biopsies.

West Australian, 18/10/08, p5

Detection: Increase in cancer tests (NSW)

The number of women having essential pap tests every two years has increased significantly. Minister Assisting the Minister for Health Tony Stewart said new data from the Government's Cancer Institute showed more than 60% of women aged over the age of 20 in NSW were having regular pap tests.

"This is an increase of 95,000 women who've had a test to check for the onset of cervical cancer in the 12 months to July 2008, compared to the same period in 2006," Mr Stewart said.

Daily Telegraph, 18/10/08, p18

Obesity: \$30m to wage war on bulging waists

A \$30 million advertising campaign encouraging Australians to measure their waists is the latest initiative to tackle the nation's obesity crisis. Health Minister Nicola Roxon said any waist measurement above 94cm for men and 80cm for women indicated an increased risk of chronic disease, such as type 2 diabetes or heart disease.

The first *Measure Up* television advertisement will air tomorrow night. The campaign will also include print and radio advertising, brochures and community promotions.

Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance chairman, Professor Ian Olver, said the campaign was the first national social marketing campaign to promote lifestyle choices. He said Australia's alarming obesity rate showed no signs of lessening, and he hoped the campaign would be the start of tackling the problem.

"We hope the new *Measure Up* campaign is part of what will become an integrated, whole-of-government response to the obesity crisis", he said.

Adelaide Advertiser, 18/10/08, p10; West Australian, 18/10/08, p17

Public health: Cancer rates to soar (WA)

The rate of cancer in WA will soar by more than 30% in the next 10 years, according to an expert. Cancer Council chief executive Professor Ian Olver, speaking ahead of the council's annual state conference in Perth on Thursday, said nurses might have to start performing routine cancer treatments normally performed by doctors.

"With the ageing population there will be an increase in cancer incidence of about 30% for each decade until the middle of the century...That figure does not take into account the obesity epidemic."

Sunday Times, 19/10/08, p39

Treatment: Gene discovery could delay brain tumours

The growth of deadly brain tumours could be halted or delayed after a gene technology breakthrough by Sydney researchers. Research funded by the Cure4Life foundation founded by renowned neurosurgeon Charles Teo found a gene that regulates sleep, body odour and pain response could be harnessed to tackle brain cancer.

The discovery could lead to a new treatment for the 1500 Australians struck down by

malignant primary brain tumours each year. Researchers found that if an enzyme encoded by the gene – called prostaglandin D2 synthase (PGDS) – was added to tumours, the growth of the tumour cells was significantly reduced and they became more susceptible to chemotherapy.

Sun Herald, 19/10/08, p7

Detection: Alarm sounds on cancer test monopoly

The competition watchdog is investigating the Australian Securities Exchange-listed Genetic Technologies after the company moved to enforce its licence rights over genetic tests for cancer.

The company wants to exclusively undertake tests of mutations to the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes – commonly linked to breast and ovarian cancers – now being carried out by publicly funded laboratories across the country.

Genetic Technologies has signalled that, from November 6, it will pursue “transitional arrangements” to protect its licence rights.

Cancer experts fear this will strip the states and territories of their capacity to carry out the tests themselves.

Liberal senator Bill Heffernan, who plans to pursue a Senate inquiry into patenting of the human genome, told parliament yesterday that Genetic Technologies had abandoned its 2003 pledge to give the test patent rights to the Australian people.

A spokeswoman for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said the consumer watchdog neither confirmed nor denied that investigations into Genetic Technologies were under way.

Cancer Council Australia’s medical adviser Graeme Suthers said he opposed the patenting of genes and called the Genetic Technologies decision the biggest challenge yet to the principle of keeping the human genome in the public domain.

Australian, 17/10/08, p7

Prevention: Frazer not immune to PM’s prize for his vaccine

Queensland immunologist and former Australian of the Year Ian Frazer has won this year’s \$300,000 Prime Minister’s Prize for Science.

“It’s obviously very nice to get this particular prize, the most prestigious prize for science in Australia”, said Professor Frazer.

As part of the prize, Professor Frazer will become a member of the Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council. Policy issues he wants to highlight include the need for greater research funding, and ensuring more young people learn how science benefits the community.

He would also like to see greater support from the philanthropic sector for biomedical research, and hopes his move to donate his \$300,000 prize money to the university will be a case of leading by example.

Australian, 17/10/08, p7Age, 17/10/08, p7; Herald Sun, 17/10/08, p22

Risk: New breast cancer link

Nicotine could play a role in the development and growth of tumours in breast cancer, according to a study published yesterday.

Researchers studied the effects of nicotine on mammary cells and concluded the chemical found in cigarette smoke could contribute to cancerous growth.

They said both breast epithelial cells – protective cell tissue – and cancerous cells have nicotine receptors, which have the potential to increase cell growth in the presence of nicotine.

Adelaide Advertiser, 17/10/08, p34

Treatment: Sugar spotlight

Radioactive sugar is saving lives. Professor Christine Glastonbury, a clinical neuroradiologist from the University of California, is speaking today at a national meeting of radiologists in Adelaide. She said CT and MR scanning helped spot and treat malignant tumours, but now a new technology is shedding more light on the process.

“We inject radioactive sugar, which then lights up highly active tissue such as cancer...we are able more accurately to localise cancers which can allow for more treatment or surgery.”

Adelaide Advertiser, 17/10/08, p2

Treatment: Impedimed gets US nod

A green light from a US regulator has resulted in Brisbane-based Impedimed proceeding with a market launch for its medical device. The device, based on University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology research, is used to detect a swelling ailment often linked to a side-effect of cancer therapy or surgery.

Impedimed said yesterday the US Food and Drug Administration has cleared its L-Dex U400 device for use in assessing the ailment in certain women who suffered from cancer.

Courier Mail, 17/10/08, p45

Skin: slip slop slap for sunlovers

The slip, slop, slap sun safety message appears to be falling on an increasing number of deaf ears. According to the Cancer Council, too many Aussies have given sun safety the slip and deserve a slap on the wrist for their failure to slop on sunscreen.

The criticism comes after a Government report found that 434,000 Australians will be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer this year, a finding the Cancer Council says is unacceptable.

The report into non-melanoma skin cancer was released yesterday on the internet. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the government agency Cancer Australia found an increased prevalence of the disease.

Professor Ian Olver, of the non-government organisation of Cancer Council Australia, said the findings were unacceptable, given non-melanoma skin cancers were preventable by taking greater care in the sun.

While non melanoma cancers accounted for only 1% of cancer deaths in Australia, the high rate of treatment poses a huge burden on the health system. The cost of treating non melanoma skin cancers was estimated to be \$260 million in 2001 but that figure would have risen significantly since then, Professor Olver said.

"It is unacceptable that around 434,000 people are treated each year for a cancer that is almost entirely preventable through appropriate sun protection," he said. "Non-melanoma skin cancer imposes an enormous burden on an already straining health system."

Professor Olver said the report findings highlighted the need to reinforce the SunSmart message.

Courier Mail, 16/10/08, p25; Northern Territory News, 16/10/08, p18

Skin: Non-melanoma cancer toll rises

More than 430,000 Australians, including children as young as four, are likely to be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer this year, costing \$300 million to treat, experts warn.

An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, to be released today, estimates that 253,000 males and 180,000 females will develop one or more types of skin cancer, such as basal-cell carcinoma and squamous-cell carcinoma, this year.

Despite the common perception that only melanomas are deadly, other skin cancers claim the lives of more than 400 Australians a year.

The report found that in 2006-07 almost 80,000 Australians were admitted to hospital because of non-melanoma skin cancer, including 2500 aged in their 20s and 30s and 35 children under 15.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said the findings were sobering and showed it was not only melanoma that could kill.

"It makes skin cancer the most costly cancer to the health system and by far the most common cancer diagnosed in Australians", he said.

West Australian, 15/10/08, p13; Canberra Times, 15/10/08, p2; Adelaide Advertiser, 15/10/08, p12

Prevention: Lifestyle limits to 'miracle' vaccines

A leading immunologist has warned Australians not to expect miracle vaccines for lifestyle-related diseases. Professor Ian Frazer, who helped develop the cervical cancer vaccine, said education about the importance of a healthy lifestyle was the key to prevention.

Professor Frazer spoke about the likelihood of developing an osteoporosis vaccine at the annual Scientific Meeting of Orthopaedic Surgeons in Hobart yesterday.

Hobart Mercury, 14/10/08, p11; Daily Telegraph, 14/10/08, p14

Prevention: Cancer hope in jam pectins

An ingredient found in jam and jelly may help prevent the spread of cancer, US research suggests. Both contain a modified form of pectin, a natural fibre found in fruit and vegetables, that is used in food processing.

An Institute of Food Research study found modified pectin released a molecular fragment that curbed all stages of cancer progression.

Researcher Vic Morris said: "I expect you would get some protection from jam, but it's packed full of sugar. It might be better to get the same protection from fruit and vegetables which would give you other anti-cancer magic bullets."

West Australian, 14/10/08, p13

Skin: Benefits of vitamin D

The leading paediatricians group in the US says children from newborns to teens should get double the usually recommended amount of vitamin D because of evidence that it may help prevent serious diseases.

To meet the new recommendation of 400 units daily, millions of children will need to take daily vitamin supplements, the American Academy of Paediatrics said.

The new advice is based on mounting research that vitamin D might reduce risks for cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Adelaide Advertiser, 14/10/08, p27

Support: \$12m care boost

The Federal Government will provide \$12 million to the McGrath Foundation for 44 new breast-care nurses around the country. Health Minister Nicola Roxon joined former Australian cricketer Glenn McGrath to announce the funding commitment at Parliament House in Canberra yesterday.

The 44 nurses will be specially trained to provide information and care to women diagnosed with breast cancer, their family and friends.

More than 40 locations - primarily in rural and regional areas - across Australia will benefit.

Australian Nursing Federation federal secretary Ged Kearney applauded the move. "Breast cancer nurses have been shown to dramatically improve treatment experiences as well as help prepare women, physically and psychologically, for the treatment process."

Herald Sun, 14/10/08, p11; Adelaide Advertiser, 14/10/08, p15; Courier Mail, 14/10/08, p12; Daily Telegraph, 14/10/08, p12; Canberra Times, 14/10/08, p5; West Australian, 14/10/08, p4

Prevention: Pill to prevent cancer

Scientists are developing a daily pill, using vitamin E derived from palm oil, that they say could prevent breast cancer in at-risk women.

The natural antioxidant could be available as a supplement in pharmacies and supermarkets within three years, says lead researcher Dr Paul Sylvester, from the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Dr Sylvester has spent two decades showing how tocotrienols, a rare form of vitamin E, can attack cancer cells in early stages without harming healthy cells.

Clinical trials in humans are scheduled to begin once animal studies are completed at the end of the year.

Dr Sylvester's team is also working on a potent synthetic product to treat early-stage breast cancer. Designed to work in combination with chemotherapy, the tocotrienol would be engineered to target breast tissue and reverse progression of the disease.

Sun Herald, 12/10/08, p27

Prevention: Better habits key to cutting cancer toll

Introducing or expanding programs for just four types of cancer and changing individuals' habits could halve Australia's overall toll of lives lost or impaired by the disease.

A consultancy firm that crunched the numbers on the impact of the disease in Australia found that individual behavioural changes held by far the greatest promise, with potential to reduce the cancer burden by 45%.

The most important lifestyle changes that would create this reduction were cutting tobacco and alcohol use, improving exercise, obesity and diet, avoiding sunlight and other sources of ultraviolet radiation, occupational carcinogens and unsafe sex.

Screening programs for breast, cervical, colorectal and liver cancers could cut a further 4%

from the nation's cancer burden, the report by consultants Pacific Strategy Partners found. PSP director Ian Clarke says while a full 49% reduction in cancer is unrealistic, a 20% reduction by 2020 is achievable and would also reduce other diseases.

"This would result in a benefit of around \$7.2 billion a year to the Australian community from that year onwards."

Cancer experts welcomed the findings. Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said the report "reflects a lot of what the Cancer Council has been saying" and generally the recommendations were sound.

"...I think it's clear that breast and cervical and colorectal cancer (screening programs) should be population-based," he said. "There should be return screening – there's no point doing it as a one-off."

Weekend Australian, 11/10/08, Health p13

Public health: Radical health moves floated

Price rises for junk food, cigarettes and alcohol; a ban on tobacco-vending machines, and tax breaks for gym memberships are among recommendations in a Federal Government report that could change the way we live.

Under the radical proposals, alcohol companies would be banned from sponsoring sporting events such as the AFL grand final, legal blood-alcohol concentration levels for drivers would be lowered and movies featuring smoking would be reclassified with a M rating.

The National Preventative Health Taskforce's inaugural report revealed that almost a third of all illness was caused by "lifestyle" diseases linked to smoking, drinking, poor diet and lack of exercise.

It warned that without urgent action on obesity the life expectancy of Australian children would be slashed by two years.

Launching the report in Melbourne yesterday, Health Minister Nicola Roxon said Australia was at a crossroads and called for community-wide action to protect future generations.

The aim is to make Australia the healthiest nation in the world by 2020. To achieve this, higher taxes would be imposed on unhealthy foods, and every school and workplace would adopt nutrition and exercise programs.

Major investment in town planning to encourage walking, cycling and sports was also recommended, and subsidies would be given to transport companies supplying healthy food to rural areas.

The report – *Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020* – was largely welcomed by health groups but Ms Roxon admitted the community "may not be ready" for some of the suggestions, particularly price increases.

The public has three months to comment on the report before the Government launches its blueprint for preventative health reform in June next year.

Age, 11/10/08, p3; Herald Sun, 11/10/08, p7; Weekend Australian, 11/10/08, p9

Skin: Warning on enviro-bulbs

They are being foisted on us as a way of saving energy, but it seems some eco-friendly light bulbs may not be as good for us as we thought. According to British Government scientists, many of the bulbs emit more than the guideline rate of harmful ultraviolet radiation. The researchers say some energy-saving fluorescent bulbs can cause reddening of the skin if used for long periods close to the body.

Britain's Health Protection Agency CEO Justin McCracken said: "We do not believe that these lights pose any significant risk in terms of skin cancer."

Courier Mail, 11/10/08, p39

Tobacco: Red wine bonus for smokers

Drinking red wine would reduce the risk of lung cancer among smokers and ex-smokers, new research suggests.

Smokers who drank at least a glass of red wine daily were 60% less likely to develop lung cancer than non-drinkers, a study found. However, white wine did not reduce the risk in the same way.

In the study, Dr Chun Chao and her colleagues looked at 84,170 men aged 45 to 69 between 2000 and 2006.

Sunday Mail Brisbane, 12/10/08, p32; Sunday Times, 12/10/08, p15

Tobacco: Pubs prosper two years on (TAS)

The state's hoteliers are breathing easy, with the news yesterday that Tasmanian pubs and clubs suffered no lasting economic losses since smoking bans came into force in 2006.

A statewide survey conducted by UTAS Innovation for the Cancer Council Tasmania also found that bar staff and patrons strongly supported the smoking bans.

Cancer Council Tasmania CEO Lawson Ride said, "Not only do non-smokers and staff breathe easier, but 31% of smokers report they light up less often, which is better for their health too.

Hobart Mercury, 11/10/08, p15

Treatment: Inquiry warning on quack doctors

A girl, 12, died after being denied cancer treatment on the advice of a "bogus practitioner", a parliamentary inquiry will hear today, prompting warnings for people to beware of quackery.

In a submission from the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Dr Michael Rice says delays in treating the girl's leukaemia put her life at risk.

The family took advice from a woman claiming to be able to cure cancer. She convinced the girl's parents not to take her back to her doctor for care.

Adelaide Advertiser, 13/10/08, p7

Detection: Tests aim to beat killer

South Australians are taking to heart the call to beat bowel cancer through early detection.

They have given the biggest response of all states and territories to a national campaign aimed at early detection and prevention of the disease.

More than 41,000 South Australians have returned their free bowel cancer screening kit since the launch of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program in SA in January last year.

Of the 94,331 test kits sent out to eligible South Australians, 41,460 (44%) were completed and returned. The national average showed 39.8% of tests returned.

Adelaide Advertiser, 10/10/08, p8

Nutrition: Food industry calls for stop on traffic-light labels

Traffic light food labels which won favour at the Prime Minister's 2020 summit as a weapon in the fight against obesity, have been attacked as simplistic and misleading by the food industry.

Health and consumer groups have hailed the labels as giving consumers an instant and simple way of spotting unhealthy food, rating contents such as fats, sugar and salts by colour. But the food industry is campaigning against the labels. A spokeswoman, Kate Carnell, says they often send the wrong message about food that can be good for you.

The debate over food labelling, is expected to come to a head at the meeting of federal and state food ministers this month.

Advocates, including the Cancer Council, argue they help people who might be vulnerable to misleading food claims.

Sydney Morning Herald, 10/10/08, p5

Prevention: Aspirin gets a boost in breast cancer fight

It is a cheap drug already used by millions of people round the world to help prevent heart attacks but now the biggest review carried out into aspirin and its links with breast cancer has found it cuts the risk of the disease by 13%.

The analysis of data from 38 studies, based on more than 2.7 million women, found that regular use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, including aspirin, reduced the chances of women developing breast cancer by 12%.

Aspirin specifically cut the risk by slightly more, while ibuprofen, one of the most common over-the-counter painkillers sold under names such as Nurofen, cut the risk by 21%.

The review by the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* in the US this week, comes after a spate of studies with conflicting results which failed to determine if the anti-inflammatory drugs helped prevent breast cancer.

Assistant professor of medicine at the university, Mahyar Etminan, said his review had pointed in favour of the drugs protecting women against the disease but said it was premature to suggest that women should take them routinely solely to prevent breast cancer. "We don't recommend the routine use of NSAIDs for breast cancer prevention until large randomised trials confirm these findings, and results from an ongoing trial will be available in 2009."

West Australian, 9/10/08, p11

Research: snails hasten pace towards cancer cure

Fresh hopes for cancer research have been found in the slimy mucus produced by a sea snail. An anti-cancer agent found in the purple secretion that the sea snail uses to protect its eggs could be used to tackle breast cancer.

The AMP Foundation and Kingsford Financial Group have sponsored Flinders Medical Centre PhD student Mr Chuang Ching Er to investigate the link.

One of Mr Er's supervisors, Dr Kirsten Benkendorff, said the snails had been used for centuries. They were used as a homeopathic remedy for cancers - although it turns out the diluted solutions rendered the active compounds useless.

But now Flinders University scientists have produced an "optimised", more concentrated extract and started testing it. "Mr Er specifically will be looking at the effect on breast cancer cell lines...we've done one test so far and it certainly looks promising," Dr Benkendorff said.

"Mr Er will be isolating some of the active compounds and testing them because what we're trying to get is something that specifically targets cancer cell lines without nasty side effects." The compound works by interfering with the way cells replicate.

Dr Benkendorff said the snails were "pretty special" and that compounds from other marine molluscs were in final stage clinical trials in the US for their anti-cancer properties.

Adelaide Advertiser, 9/10/08, p6

Research: scientists make key breast cancer find

A group of Melbourne researchers has discovered an important piece in the puzzle of how breast cancer develops. Through implantation of breast cells in mice, scientists at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research have made two key findings related to the way the Notch pathway of proteins works in breast tissue.

Researchers Toulia Bouras, Jane Visvader and Geoff Lindeman identified how the Notch pathway of proteins regulates breast development and function by prompting breast stem cells to switch on the production of breast duct cells.

They also discovered a link between an overactive Notch pathway and the proliferation of immature cells in the breast ducts that can develop into tumours.

"The discovery has really revealed a mechanism by which overactivity of the Notch pathway may contribute to breast cancer," Dr Visvader said. "If drugs can be developed that target this process in an effective way, this offers hope for future generations of patients whose cancers have an overactive Notch pathway."

The researchers findings are in the latest international journal, *Cell Stem Cell*.

Canberra Times, 9/10/08, p3

Detection: Cancer victim sues service

A terminally ill Sydney woman is suing for damages, arguing that performance bonuses for radiologists may have led to her breast cancer not being diagnosed.

In a case that may have ramifications for cancer screening across the country, Christine Ann O'Gorman is suing the Sydney South West Area Health Service for damages and future economic loss after radiologists at its free breast screen service in Camperdown allegedly interpreted her 2004 and 2006 mammograms incorrectly.

Ms O'Gorman was not diagnosed with breast cancer until January last year, after she felt a lump in her left breast. She was later found to have developed tumours in her lungs and brain.

In the NSW Supreme Court yesterday, Ms O'Gorman claimed that had she been recalled for an ultrasound test after her 2004 and 2006 mammograms, her cancer would have been detected, her treatment would have been started "without further delay" and she would not have gone on to develop other cancers.

The court heard that BreastScreen became a business arm of the area health service about 2004, after which it introduced a requirement that no more than 5% of breast screens be recalled for further testing.

This "brought into play performance standards which carried with them performance bonuses", Tony Bartley, Ms O'Gorman's barrister said.

Sydney Morning Herald, 8/10/08, p2; Age, 8/10/08, p4; Daily Telegraph, 8/10/08, p11

Obesity: Tracking progress of obese hotline callers (NSW)

Callers to a new anti-obesity hotline will be monitored by the State Government to see if they are losing weight, eating enough vegetables, taking drugs or alcohol and exercising enough. The Government is hiring a company to check up on people who call its Get Healthy telephone coaching service to find out if they are doing what they're told. Callers will get individually tailored coaching sessions of up to 10 calls over a six month period.

The Government has tendered out the running of the service, expected to be launched in January 2009.

Daily Telegraph, 8/10/08, p13

Skin: Shining a light on mental health

Sun-shy Australians might be saving themselves from skin cancer at the expense of their mental health.

A Melbourne University study has shown a link between depression and a lack of vitamin D. It found high rates of vitamin D deficiency among psychiatric patients, most of whom suffered depression.

The study blamed sedentary lifestyles, a tendency to stay indoors and heightened fears about skin cancer and ageing for alarming vitamin D deficiency rates.

The study's author, Prof Michael Berk, of Barwon Health and The Geelong Clinic, said while too much sun was dangerous, too little sun was also harmful and education campaigns needed to reflect this.

Manager of Cancer Council Victoria's SunSmart program Sue Heward, said the importance of vitamin D had been recognised in its advice for several years. "UV radiation is a major cause of skin cancer but also the best source of vitamin D, so a balance is vital," she said.

The study is published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.

Herald Sun, 8/10/08, p16

Tobacco: Help call for all smokers

Australia's smoking rate has halved during the past two decades but the big health push has failed people with a mental illness. Mental illness sufferers are four times more likely to smoke than the general population – a rate that has remained steady for the past 20 years.

University of Melbourne researcher Kristen Moeller-Saxone surveyed 280 clients of a psychiatric support service in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Of the patients surveyed, most of whom had schizophrenia, more than 6 out of 10 smoked, compared with the national average of fewer than 2 in 10.

Smokers with a mental illness averaged 22 cigarettes a day, which is 50% more than smokers without a mental illness.

Adelaide Advertiser, 8/10/08, p33

Tobacco: Legal drawback (international)

Lawyers for the biggest US cigarette maker have gone before the Supreme Court to argue that Washington politicians are to blame if anyone felt tricked into thinking that light cigarettes were less dangerous than regular smokes.

If the highest court in the United States rules against Altria, whose Phillip Morris unit is best known for Marlboro cigarettes, cigarette manufacturers could be forced to pay out staggering legal settlements to ex-smokers.

Canberra Times, 8/10/08, p8

Detection: Check your prostate in 10 minutes

Men can now have a simple finger-prick blood test that checks for a marker of prostate cancer and can give the results in just 10 minutes.

Launched in Britain yesterday, the test needs only a drop of blood to look for prostate specific antigen (PSA).

The PSAwatch test allows the blood to be almost immediately analysed by a portable machine in a doctor's surgery and can be carried out by nursing staff.

It uses a single drop of blood which is tested for PSA at a cost of about \$100. The test has been approved for use in Europe and its go ahead in other countries is expected soon.

West Australian, 7/10/08, p16

Nutrition: Teenage diets drastically short in healthy foods

Only 1% of Australian teenagers eat the required amount of fruit and just 5% eat enough vegetables. A survey of almost 4500 teenagers and children conducted by the Health Department and the Australian Food and Grocery Council found that younger children eat vastly more fruit and vegetables and that consumption nosedives in the mid-teens. The survey tracked the eating and exercise habits of 4487 boys and girls aged between 2 and 16 over one week and found that 61% of children aged 4-8 were eating the required 1-3 servings of fruit a day, but a mere 1% of those aged 14-16 were eating enough fruit. Despite concerns about rising childhood obesity, the survey found that 72% of children were at a healthy weight, with 17% being classed as overweight. Overall the amount of children defined as obese was 6%, only marginally more than the percentage of children classed as underweight.
Age, 4/10/08, p11; Weekend Australian, 4/10/08, p9; Courier Mail, 4/10/08, p24; Hobart Mercury, 4/10/08, p1

Obesity: Fat-fight funding for teen surgery (NSW)

Fat teenagers will be given drastic weight-loss surgery under a NSW Government strategy to fight the obesity epidemic. The Children's Hospital at Westmead is set to be the first in the State to offer taxpayer-funded gastric banding.

Doctors say the radical measure is needed to save teens with severe weight-related health conditions. Publicly-funded weight-loss surgery is expected to be available across the State by 2012.

Sunday Telegraph, 5/10/08, p5

Obesity: Daycare health checks plan to head off obesity (QLD)

Compulsory health checks for three and four-year olds at daycare centres will be considered to target QLD's spiralling obesity epidemic.

The measure is being considered by the state Government as it targets preventative lifestyle diseases – smoking, obesity, alcohol and sun exposure – that are clogging the state's healthcare system and costing about \$5 million a year.

Australian, 6/10/08, p2

Prevention: New hope on breast cancer

Doctors say they could soon be within reach of a breast cancer vaccine using hormones associated with pregnancy and breastfeeding which were known to protect women from the disease.

A leading British researcher says scientists could soon be harnessing hormonal changes during late pregnancy and while women breastfed which were capable of providing life-long protection against breast cancer.

Professor Valerie Beral, from Oxford University, has told the annual conference of the National Cancer Research Institute in Britain that a vaccine to prevent breast cancer needed to be pursued and the hormones oestrogen and prolactin could be used to provide a protective effect in all women.

Her comments came only days after researchers from Wayne State University in Detroit announced they had developed a vaccine which completely eliminated one type of breast cancer cells, known as HER2-positive, in mice which had previously been resistant to treatment.

They said if the vaccine was found to be effective and safe in humans, it could be used to treat the 20-25% of women with breast cancer which was HER2-positive and could lead to broader preventative vaccines for breast cancer.

West Australian, 7/10/08, p18

Public health: Cancer 'can be halved'

Australia could halve the number of cancer-related deaths each year without any medical breakthroughs or new treatments, a new report says. This is the equivalent to saving almost 20,000 lives annually.

New research prepared for the federal government reveals 49% of the national cancer burden could be prevented through behavioural change and better screening. Experts found six main factors were causing unnecessary deaths and illness: smoking, obesity, alcohol, UV exposure, workplace carcinogens and unsafe sex.

This worked out as 18,000 Australians dying from cancer. A further 1600 deaths could be

avoided by boosting screening for lung, bowel, breast and prostate cancer, researchers found.

The report was prepared by the consulting firm Pacific Strategy Partners.

Sunday Telegraph, 5/10/08, p29

Risk: Hepatitis B virus and pancreatic cancer

Hepatitis B virus may increase the risk of developing lethal pancreatic cancer, claims new research in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, suggesting that vaccination against the virus could reduce pancreatic cancer risk.

The study involved 476 patients with early pancreatic cancer and 879 healthy controls. Blood samples were tested for antibodies against the hepatitis B virus (HBV), which is an indicator of past exposure. HPV antibodies were found in 7.6% of people with pancreatic cancer, but in only 3.2% of the controls.

Weekend Australian, 4/10/08, Health p12

Skin: Pale teens outshine bronzed Aussies (WA)

Bronzed bodies on WA beaches could be less common this summer, with new research showing a marked drop in the number of teenagers who want a suntan.

A Cancer Council WA survey of more than 1000 West Australians show that 14 to 17-year-olds are far less keen on having a tan compared with four years ago, with 43% of teenage boys and girls wanting the bronzed look now compared with 70% in 2003.

Even among those wanting a tan, more now favour a light to moderate tan rather than a dark tan.

Council director of education and research Terry Slevin believed the deaths of two young people from melanoma in the past year might have prompted more teenagers to weigh up whether a brown tan was worth the risk.

West Australian, 6/10/08, p5

Skin: Tanning beds kill 43 a year

Tanning beds kill 43 Australians a year on average through melanoma and are responsible for a further 2600 skin cancer diagnoses, according to a new report calling for a crackdown on solariums.

Researchers in Brisbane and Sydney have made a case for tough federal regulations that either ban or sharply limit access to tanning solariums nationwide.

A team at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research has used a British mathematical model to estimate that sun beds are responsible for 281 cases a year of melanoma.

Overall, 43 of these patients die. About 2500 new cases of other skin cancers could also be attributed to using solariums.

Team scientist Louisa Gordon writes in the current *Medical Journal of Australia*: "The annual cost to the health system – predominantly Medicare Australia – for these avoidable skin cancer cases and deaths is about \$3 million. By successfully enforcing solarium regulations that ban use by people under 18 or with fair skin, favourable health and cost benefits can be expected."

Australian, 6/10/08, p6; Canberra Times, 6/10/08, p2; Daily Telegraph, 6/10/08, p12; Hobart Mercury, 6/10/08, p11; Adelaide Advertiser, 6/10/08, p20; Age, 6/10/08, p3; Herald Sun, 6/10/08, p7

Tobacco: Diet to die for

More than half of Australian women who smoke keep the habit to stay thin, a new survey reveals. Research by Jenny Craig found 53% of female smokers believe cigarettes make them eat less, with 45% confirming they did gain weight when they tried to quit.

This prompted 46% to take up smoking again.

Sunday Telegraph, 5/10/08, p26

Treatment: Hospital treated animals secretly

Equipment to treat cancer patients at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne has been used after hours on pets for 17 years without the Victorian Government's knowledge or approval.

After a Sunday newspaper reported that 22 animals had been treated at the hospital's William Buckland Radiation Centre since 2005, it emerged that the practice had been going on for much longer.

Health Minister Daniel Andrews said: "This is an inappropriate use of our vital public health resources and it will not continue."

A spokesman for The Alfred yesterday said pets had been treated after hours at the hospital from 1991 until last week. He stressed the radiation therapy was carried out after hours and animals were never treated ahead of human patients. "In all cases infection control was above and beyond what it needed to be. There was no way human safety was ever compromised."

The Alfred has defended the practice, saying it was a public service which came at no cost to the hospital.

Australian, 6/10/08, p3; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 5/10/08, p33; Sunday Herald Sun, 5/10/08, p1

Treatment: Vitamin C found to lessen efficacy of anti-cancer drugs

Vitamin C supplements could reduce the effectiveness of anti-cancer drugs, according to a new study in *Cancer Research*. While cancer patients undergoing treatment should eat a healthy diet, including foods rich in vitamin C, the authors caution against taking high doses of vitamin C supplements.

Researchers pre-treated cancer cells with vitamin C in the laboratory, and then tested their response to a range of chemotherapy drugs designed to kill cancer cells.

Weekend Australian, 4/10/08, Health p12

Treatment: Cancer drug 'too costly'

Anti-cancer drug Avastin is unaffordable and pharmaceutical giants could do more to help, experts say. Breast Cancer Network Australia policy manager Michelle Marven said that at \$2500 to \$5700 for a course of the drug, which is claimed to cut off a tumour's blood supply, was too expensive.

"There is a role for pharmaceutical companies to be providing better access for women while they wait for the pharmaceutical benefit scheme process", she said.

Herald Sun, 6/10/08, p14

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Men can now have a simple finger-prick blood test that checks for a marker of prostate cancer and can give the results in just 10 minutes.

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Researchers in Brisbane and Sydney have made a case for tough federal regulations that either ban or sharply limit access to tanning solariums nationwide.

A team at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research has used a British mathematical model to estimate that sun beds are responsible for 281 cases a year of melanoma.

Overall, 43 of these patients die. About 2500 new cases of other skin cancers could also be attributed to using solariums.

Team scientist Louisa Gordon writes in the current *Medical Journal of Australia*: "The annual cost to the health system – predominantly Medicare Australia – for these avoidable skin cancer cases and deaths is about \$3 million. By successfully enforcing solarium regulations that ban use by people under 18 or with fair skin, favourable health and cost benefits can be expected."

Australian, 6/10/08, p6; Canberra Times, 6/10/08, p2; Daily Telegraph, 6/10/08, p12; Hobart Mercury, 6/10/08, p11; Adelaide Advertiser, 6/10/08, p20; Age, 6/10/08, p3; Herald Sun, 6/10/08, p7

Tobacco: Diet to die for

More than half of Australian women who smoke keep the habit to stay thin, a new survey reveals. Research by Jenny Craig found 53% of female smokers believe cigarettes make them eat less, with 45% confirming they did gain weight when they tried to quit.

This prompted 46% to take up smoking again.

Sunday Telegraph, 5/10/08, p26

Treatment: Hospital treated animals secretly

Equipment to treat cancer patients at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne has been used after hours on pets for 17 years without the Victorian Government's knowledge or approval.

After a Sunday newspaper reported that 22 animals had been treated at the hospital's William Buckland Radiation Centre since 2005, it emerged that the practice had been going on for much longer.

Health Minister Daniel Andrews said: "This is an inappropriate use of our vital public health resources and it will not continue."

A spokesman for The Alfred yesterday said pets had been treated after hours at the hospital from 1991 until last week. He stressed the radiation therapy was carried out after hours and animals were never treated ahead of human patients. "In all cases infection control was above and beyond what it needed to be. There was no way human safety was ever compromised."

The Alfred has defended the practice, saying it was a public service which came at no cost to the hospital.

Australian, 6/10/08, p3; Sunday Mail Adelaide, 5/10/08, p33; Sunday Herald Sun, 5/10/08, p1

Treatment: Vitamin C found to lessen efficacy of anti-cancer drugs

Vitamin C supplements could reduce the effectiveness of anti-cancer drugs, according to a new study in *Cancer Research*. While cancer patients undergoing treatment should eat a healthy diet, including foods rich in vitamin C, the authors caution against taking high doses of vitamin C supplements.

Researchers pre-treated cancer cells with vitamin C in the laboratory, and then tested their response to a range of chemotherapy drugs designed to kill cancer cells.

Weekend Australian, 4/10/08, Health p12

Treatment: Cancer drug 'too costly'

Anti-cancer drug Avastin is unaffordable and pharmaceutical giants could do more to help, experts say. Breast Cancer Network Australia policy manager Michelle Marven said that at \$2500 to \$5700 for a course of the drug, which is claimed to cut off a tumour's blood supply, was too expensive.

"There is a role for pharmaceutical companies to be providing better access for women while they wait for the pharmaceutical benefit scheme process", she said.

Herald Sun, 6/10/08, p14

Environment: National Gallery not a 'sick building'

A two-year investigation into an alleged cancer cluster at the National Gallery of Australia has found the building is not likely to have been the source of the cancers among staff.

The investigation, led by epidemiologist Tim Driscoll, found little difference in the rates of cancer among gallery employees and the general population.

"The top five cancers we found were the top five cancers in Australia generally, and the ages at which they occurred were the sorts of age you would expect, so there is nothing in there to set off alarm bells."

The investigation found staff had possibly been exposed to potentially dangerous carcinogens. But Dr Driscoll said these exposures were not great enough to have increased the risk of gallery staff, visitors or volunteers contracting cancer.

The report found cancer rates among present and former gallery staff were 14% lower than the national average.

Canberra Times, 3/10/08, p3

Nutrition: Delay fears on health plan (SA)

A contractor has yet to be chosen to run a government-funded healthy-eating program in schools, just four months from its planned start date. The inaction has raised concerns the initiative will not begin on time.

Tenders for the Eat Well Be Active program closed on April 7 but the Government is only set to announce a contractor next week.

Earlier this year the Government announced it would introduce a community-based healthy-weight program developed in France, known as the EPODE strategy.

Adelaide Advertiser, 3/10/08, p27

Obesity: Obesity epidemic a 'myth'

Australia's children are no fatter than they were 10 years ago, prompting experts to warn the exaggerated focus on an obesity "epidemic" is increasing the rate of eating disorders.

A report out today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – *General practice activity in Australia 1998-99 to 2007-08: 10 year data tables* - shows the rates of both overweight and obese children have stalled in the past decade.

11% of children aged from two to 17 are obese, while 17% are overweight.

Health experts say while these figures are still too high, the confusing messages about weight loss as governments warn of an "epidemic" are having a negative impact on children's self-esteem.

Study author Professor Helena Britt said it was not a surprise rates had plateaued, and that it had taken 10 years to come to the attention of the media and governments. She agreed a focus on healthy lifestyle rather than weight was needed.

Adelaide Advertiser, 3/10/08

Tobacco: Indian smoking ban

India imposed a new ban on smoking in public places yesterday, four years after a largely ignored earlier prohibition saw people continue to puff away in restaurants, clubs and bars.

One in three Indians smokes some form of tobacco and one in every 10 deaths in India from 2010 will be smoking-related, experts say.

Canberra Times, 3/10/08, p12

Treatment: Long wait for urgent cases

Waiting lists for cancer patients and other seriously ill Victorians have more than doubled in the past six months.

The annual check-up of hospitals yesterday showed the Brumby Government failed five of the nine benchmarks it set for the system. The report showed more than 1000 patients were left waiting for urgent elective surgery in June, compared with just 521 in December. Health Minister Daniel Andrews said hospitals favoured people who had waited the longest – generally non-urgent patients – in reducing the overall list. The reduction came at the expense of patients requiring urgent treatment for conditions such as cancer, heart-related illness and some trauma-related conditions.

Herald Sun, 3/10/08, p9

Nutrition: Nutrition label plan

Supermarket giants Woolworths and Coles will join discount retailer Aldi in adopting new “daily intake” nutrition labels that display a product’s energy content on the front of the food packet.

But the plan has disappointed health and consumer groups, who argue the labels are too confusing and are instead pushing for a “traffic light” colour-coded system of labelling.

Age, 2/10/08, p6

Obesity: More for less

Medicare should help pay for obese Australians to go to weight-loss classes, a top Queensland Health bureaucrat has recommended. Linda Selvey, who heads the population health branch, said yesterday that the national health system should recognise obesity as a chronic disease, allowing treatment to be covered by Medicare.

“With such a high proportion of the population overweight or obese, I would argue 58% of the adult population should have access to these types of programs,” Dr Selvey said.

The proposal drew immediate fire from the Australian Medical Association, which argued Medicare rebates should be reserved for visits to a medical practitioner.

But Dr Selvey’s view was backed by obesity researchers at the University of Queensland’s Centre for Burden of Disease and Cost-Effectiveness.

Courier Mail, 2/10/08, p1

Tobacco: Plain packs ‘turn-off’ for smokers

Australian anti-tobacco groups are stepping up efforts for cigarettes to be sold in plain brown packs after new research showed they made smoking appear less trendy and more “cheap and nasty”.

The Australian Council on Smoking and Health said it would use the Cancer Council Victoria study to lobby WA Health Minister Kim Hames to support national action on generic packaging.

The study, published in the international journal *Tobacco Control*, found that smokers rated mocked-up plain cigarette packs as less mature and attractive than those with current branding.

The Cancer Council said the findings were further evidence that the tobacco industry should be forced to remove all logos, colours and imagery from cigarette packs.

Quit policy manager Kylie Lindorff said cigarette packs had the main role in communicating brand image and luring new smokers.

Ms Lindorff said plain packaging would be one of the most straight-forward reforms the Commonwealth Government could introduce to reduce the devastating and unnecessary toll of tobacco.

ACOSH president Mike Daube said plain packaging was inevitable. “There is no reason whatever for Australia’s main killer drug to be seductively marketed, and we will be sending a copy of this paper to the new Health Minister seeking his support for national action,” Mr Daube said.

West Australian, 2/10/08, p18;

Obesity: Parents, not TV, blamed for obesity

Banning junk-food commercials is not the answer to curbing childhood obesity, an advertising expert says. University of Sunshine Coast adjunct professor Glen Wiggs will address a House of Representatives health committee hearing in Brisbane today on obesity in Australia.

“Bans per se don’t really work and indeed they can actually lead to increased consumption,” Professor Wiggs said. “Advertising is 2% to blame for childhood obesity, so banning advertisements won’t make any difference, but at best it will make a 2% difference.”

The Bligh Government (QLD) has revealed plans to roll out the nation's first TV advertising regulations for kids' shows, but Professor Wiggs said parents were to blame. "It comes down to snacking frequency and kids copying their parents; this is a big cause of the obesity problem".

Courier Mail, 1/10/08, p11

Skin: Council tips its hat to new research

A revision of the traditional school "no hat, no play" rule to allow students to go hatless on winter days when the UV index was below 3 was a sign the Cancer Council WA was keeping up with the latest research on necessary sun exposure for health benefits, said Terry Slevin, council director of education and research.

By no means was the Cancer Council sticking its head in the sand when it came to the issue of the positives of sun exposure, he said. It was taking the matter very seriously, actively reviewing and contributing to scientific research in this area.

"We are following it very closely," Mr Slevin said. "We are not going to lock into a single and rigid set of SunSmart recommendations and ignore the evolution of this science. Some of the research is suggesting there might even be some cancer benefits from vitamin D."

One of the theories under examination was that sunlight and vitamin D had a preventative benefit for colorectal cancer, Mr Slevin said. But researchers were yet to explain why countries such as Australia, with high rates of sun-exposure-related skin cancer, did not show below-average rates of colorectal cancer.

Already, the International Agency for Research on Cancer was conducting a major review of the interlinked issues of sunlight, cancer and health, he said, with one of the early recommendations being there needed to be much more localised advice due to demographic and geographic differences.

West Australian, 1/10/08, Health p4

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.