

CANCER IN THE NEWS AUGUST 2008

Obesity: Parents fail to see child obesity

Fewer than 25% of parents of overweight children realise that their child is carrying too much weight, South Australian health experts have warned.

Flinders University childhood obesity research experts Rebecca Perry and Anthea Magarey, in a submission to a parliamentary inquiry into obesity, have raised concerns about the low level of parental awareness about obesity.

They say this low level of awareness shows the need for awareness campaigns for parents, to help them realise their children are overweight. This would assist with identifying overweight children, and encouraging them to seek treatment.

Adelaide Advertiser, 29/8/08, p23

Research: Milk may help fight cancer

The role of cow's milk in preventing bowel cancer is being explored through new research being done at Flinders University in Adelaide. The university said yesterday it expected to have clear evidence by the end of the year on the role milk could play in boosting the anti-cancer properties of a natural trace element, selenium.

In a human trial, cancer expert Graeme Young is testing the benefit of selenium when delivered through cow's milk compared with other forms of the dietary supplement.

The study involves 20 people. Researchers are comparing the milk form of selenium with a yeast form and looking at how readily they are absorbed.

Sydney Morning Herald, 29/8/08, p7; Herald Sun, 29/8/08, p20; Adelaide Advertiser, 29/8/08, p11

Screening: Repeat screening saves lives

Older Australians who undergo screening for bowel cancer every two years have almost a 20% lower likelihood of dying from the disease.

A study by the Cancer Institute of NSW lends strong support to biennial screening, as experts call for the Federal Government to expand the scheme.

Currently, people are mailed a test when they turn 50, 55 or 65 but there has been no financial commitment for repeat tests, raising the risk of new tumours going undetected.

The report shows a biennial scheme would be cost-effective for the health system and would save a significant number of lives.

Adelaide Advertiser, 29/8/08; Daily Telegraph, 29/8/08, p25

Tobacco control: Smoking on the rise in Tassie

Tasmanian smoking rates continue to increase and risky drinking is worse than in other states, a new study shows. Nearly one in seven Tasmanian teenage girls are lighting up daily but boys are avoiding getting hooked.

The 2007 drug survey by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare says 22.7% of Tasmanians 14 and older smoke daily. That compares with a national rate of 16.6%. In 2004, 21.5% of Tasmanians smoked daily.

Hobart Mercury, 29/9/08, p11

Treatment: Terminal patients preyed on

An unregistered healer preyed on dying cancer patients by selling bogus therapies for tens of thousands of dollars, a three-year investigation has found.

Noel Campbell, who refers to himself as Prof Campbell but who has no medical qualifications other than as a dentist, was found by Victoria's Health Services Commissioner Beth Wilson to have misled patients.

Mr Campbell closed his busy Hope Clinic, in Collins St, in May after more than a decade of offering – for up to \$3500 a week – treatments such as ozone gas and microwave therapies, enemas and homemade medications he claimed could beat cancer. The treatments have been ridiculed by cancer experts.

Ms Wilson lacks power to prevent Mr Campbell offering cancer treatments, but Health Minister Daniel Andrews has asked Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Medical Practitioners Board to launch inquiries. *Herald Sun, 29/8/08, p31*

Public Health: ACMA to crack down on pester power – but not junk food ads

The Australian Communications and Media Authority has refused to bow to demands that it fight a national childhood obesity epidemic by banning junk food advertising in children's television programs. It has however, moved to stamp out "pester power" ads using popular personalities or cartoon characters.

These are key recommendations arising from a two-year review of children's television standards, released yesterday.

ACMA chair Chris Chapman called for public comment on the report's preliminary recommendations, saying he would welcome robust debate. "We are not closing the door on the junk food issue. We would consider reviewing our position if evidence of an identifiably stronger link between advertising and obesity becomes available."

In submissions to the ACMA review, a working party representing all state health departments called for the ban. Of the 76 submissions received, 67 raised the issue of junk food.

ACMA was inundated with 20,521 postcards calling for a ban as a result of the Cancer Council's Pull the Plug campaign.

Mr Chapman said the authority was not a health advisory body and had to rely on evidence, and at this stage there was not enough evidence to show that television advertising contributed to childhood obesity.

Local research commissioned by ACMA concluded there was a correlation between advertising and children's knowledge of the nutritional value of foods, and there was a correlation between general television viewing and obesity, but the research did not show that television junk food advertising caused obesity.

The report proposes tighter rules on the use of celebrities, cartoon characters, movie characters or popular personalities, saying the move is justified because research shows children are easily influenced by characters and celebrities.

Other advertising using premium offers to attract children to pester their parents for purchases will also be restricted to ensure that the premium offered is incidental to the product being advertised.

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children has slammed the draft report as a major setback in the battle against childhood obesity.

ACMA will take submissions on its preliminary report until October 17. A final report is expected early next year.

Australian, 28/8/08, p31; Sydney Morning Herald, 28/8/08, p3

Public Health: Students help in indigenous cancer probe

Brisbane scientists have launched studies into why indigenous Queenslanders are 38% more likely to die from cancer than the rest of the population even though they are no more likely to get the disease.

Queensland Institute of Medical Research indigenous health program head, Gail Garvey, says researchers suspect Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders with cancer are less likely to have surgery than other Queenslanders.

"We're doing some...work talking to Aboriginal cancer patients, their carers and health professionals to try to find out what some of the barriers are from their perspective," she says. QIMR PhD student Sue Moore is comparing treatments given to indigenous and non-indigenous cancer patients to see if any differences exist. "Primarily, I'm comparing rates of surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and other treatments and looking at whether there are any differences in those given to people living in rural and urban areas."

Courier Mail, 28/8/08, p71

Public Health: Well-heeled heal better (International)

If you are educated or have a high income you are more likely to live longer after a cancer diagnosis than your peers who have less money or education. This is the finding of a large Danish investigation published in a special issue of the *European Journal of Cancer*.

For all cancers, after one year, education or money conferred a 10% benefit in survival. This reduced to about 2% after five years.

Australian Financial Review, 28/8/08, p66

Nutrition: Prime time junk food ads face chopping block in battle of the bulge (QLD)

Junk food advertising could be banned or restricted during children's television programming

from next year under a plan to curb childhood obesity. The Bligh Government is planning to roll out the nation's first television advertising regulations for kid's shows which may include programming for most of the day. The move forms part of a five-point Advancing Health Action plan.

Premier Anna Bligh yesterday refused to guarantee new laws would be introduced but said it was her intention to deliver protection from the tidal wave of advertising early next year.

A discussion paper proposes bans or restrictions for peak children's viewing times from 7am to 9am and 5pm to 8.30pm or unsupervised times from 7am to 9am and 3pm to 6pm.

Courier Mail, 27/8/08, p5

Nutrition: Junk food ads fears (SA)

Nutrition experts have called for the State Government to take control of junk food advertising aimed at children. Flinders University lecturer in nutrition Kaye Mehta said there was a compelling argument for governments to step in, saying: "I don't think we are seeing any serious action by the food and beverage industry."

Health Minister John Hill yesterday released a discussion paper on TV advertising and the "consumption of unhealthy food and drinks by children".

Adelaide Advertiser, 27/8/08, p4

Prevention: Breast cancer 'prevention pill' available in 3 years

Scientists are developing a once-a-day pill using vitamin D derived from palm oil which they believe could help prevent breast cancer and treat early signs of the disease.

Perth biotechnology company Beta Pharmaceuticals and researchers in the US and Hong Kong say their ground-breaking research could offer a simple, non-invasive and inexpensive way to prevent and treat the most common cancer in women, with the first commercial product likely to be available in three years.

The research focuses on "chemoprevention" to reduce the risk of cancer developing using tocotrienol, a rare form of vitamin E which has shown in animal and laboratory studies to have an anti-cancer effect without affecting healthy tissue.

Researcher Paul Sylvester, from the University of Louisiana's college of pharmacy, has been studying tocotrienol for more than a decade but said that until now most of the research had been in cell cultures or in small animal studies. But now access to big quantities of purified tocotrienol allowed a big pre-clinical trial in specially bred mice with breast tumours.

"This is very relevant because if the treatment works in these mice with exactly the same type of tumours that women get, then there's very strong evidence that it will work in women," Dr Sylvester said.

"The idea is to have a low-dose form, like a daily supplement, that is a preventative treatment, but if women have developed breast cancer you would use the compound in a high-dose form and perhaps in combination with other known anti-cancer agents.

Dr Sylvester said once the mice study finished in four months, human trials could begin and a commercial preventative product could be available in about three years.

West Australian, 27/8/08, p15

Public Health: Cancer myth busters

Myths about cancer causes abound and are putting the lives of many people at risk, research shows.

A survey of almost 30,000 people in 29 countries, including 1271 Australians, found people believe environmental factors are more of a cancer risk than they are. People also play down the behavioural factors that are well known to raise the risk of cancer.

The research, to be presented at the International Union Against Cancer world congress in Geneva today, identified key areas where myths could be dispelled and lives saved.

One of the most important findings is that people in rich countries, including Australia, were least likely to believe alcohol raises the risk of cancer, compared with 26% of people in middle-income countries and 15% in poor nations.

And in rich countries, people incorrectly believed not eating enough fruit and vegetables was more of a risk than alcohol.

They were also more likely to cite stress and air pollution as higher risk factors for cancer than alcohol intake, despite the fact stress is not recognised as a cause and air pollution is only a minor contributor.

The report also found people in all countries were more ready to accept that things outside

their control, such as air pollution, might be more of a cancer risk than things within their control, such as being overweight.

A team from Cancer Council Victoria analysed the results of the survey, by Roy Morgan Research and Gallup International on behalf of the international union.

Cancer Council Victoria president Professor David Hill, to be installed today as the union's president, said the findings showed more education was needed about cancer risks.

Herald Sun, 27/8/08, p28

Support: Speaking about the unmentionable

Sexuality and information about prognosis and expensive treatment options too often remain "elephants in the room" during consultations between cancer patients and their doctors, according to oncologist Michael Jefford.

Associate Professor Jefford, from Melbourne's Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, said doctors sometimes avoided these difficult issues and withheld information because they judged it might upset their patients, cause embarrassment or not be of interest. Or they lacked the training to help them find the right words and feel comfortable handling challenging discussions.

"People don't talk about prognosis because it is hard, it's scary for both the doctor and the patient. Doctors don't routinely talk about sexual issues and complications because they find it difficult and they don't have the training, they don't have the words, and they don't feel comfortable."

A survey of oncologists around Australia had shown between 28 and 41% would not mention a new, expensive drug treatment that might improve survival, have reduced side-effects or provide hope where no other option existed, if they thought the patient might be upset if they could not afford it.

Public surveys showed 91% of people wanted to be informed, even if not willing or easily able to pay for the treatment.

And with more drugs now being developed and approved for use but still awaiting or not funded by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, it was likely to become an issue increasingly faced by clinicians, Professor Jefford said.

West Australian, 27/8/08, p7

Nutrition: Fruit and vegetables cuts risk of disease, study finds

Antioxidant-rich fruit and vegetables such as oranges, carrots and broccoli can reduce the risk of diseases such as cancer of the larynx, oesophagus, cervix and lungs, according to a landmark WA study into how fresh produce can ward off illness.

The study by Edith Cowan University nutritionists found that people who ate two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables a day could cut their risk of developing a range of cancers, heart and blood vessel disease, metabolic syndrome, and bone disease.

The researchers said while some of the protection against common diseases came from the weight loss associated with diets high in fruit and vegetables, there was now good evidence that phytochemicals and vitamins such as A, C and E in fresh produce had their own powerful antioxidant effects.

The study, Vegetables and Fruit for Health and Healing, carried out with Vegetables WA and Western Potatoes, has recommended that Food Standards Australia and New Zealand investigate ways to use the findings to make "high level health claims" about the prevention of serious diseases.

Public Health Advocacy Institute director Mike Daube said the findings confirmed the health benefits of fresh foods and only highlighted that far too much was being spent promoting junk food.

West Australian, 26/8/08, p5

Public health: Oncology unit work to start by October (NT)

The construction of Darwin's radiation oncology unit is set to start in October. The Halikos Group was awarded the \$7.6 million contract to design and construct the unit, which is expected to be completed by the next dry season.

The radiation oncology unit is expected to be up and running by the end of 2009. Royal Adelaide Hospital has agreed to operate the service.

Northern Territory News, 26/8/08, p6

Screening: Doctors fear drop in pap tests with cancer vaccine

Australia's cervical cancer rate could start to rise again if a new generation of young women vaccinated against the disease is not encouraged to continue having pap smears, says a group of specialist doctors who are calling on the Federal Government to clarify the screening program's future.

The pathologists, who include the inventor of the cervical cancer vaccine Professor Ian Frazer, met two weeks ago to develop a new policy on preventing the disease. The move comes amid concern that immunisation could give women a false sense of security and undermine pap smear screening, credited with halving cervical cancer cases and deaths since its introduction.

Annabelle Farnsworth, director of cancer pathology at Douglass Hanly Moir Pathology, said government analysis had shown the expected cancer risk was three times higher in vaccinated women who did not have pap tests than among unimmunised women who had regular two-yearly smears.

A spokesman for Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the Government would continue its efforts to ensure broad vaccination against HPV, and no changes were currently planned to the existing arrangements for pap smears.

It was unknown whether vaccinating against some strains might adversely affect women's natural immune defences against others, Dr Charlotte Haug wrote last week in the influential *New England Journal of Medicine*.

West Australian, 26/8/08, p14; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26/8/08, p8

Skin: Teen alert on vitamin deficiency (TAS)

A third of Tasmanian teenagers are Vitamin D deficient, the Menzies Research Institute warned yesterday.

Menzies researcher Tania Winzenberg said Vitamin D deficiency was common in Tasmanian children, particularly teenagers. "Some teenagers might think they are outdoors enough and get enough sun but they might still be Vitamin D deficient," Dr Winzenberg said.

"We found teenagers are engaged in more and more inside activities as they get older...While it is important to maintain sun protection, it's about striking a balance."

Hobart Mercury, 26/8/08, p12

Tobacco control: Anti-smoking push to save 55,000 Aussies, study says

A national anti-smoking campaign has prompted nearly 200,000 people to kick the habit and should prevent about 55,000 deaths, new research has shown.

The hard-hitting 'Every cigarette is doing you damage' campaign, which started 11 years ago and cost about \$9 million, is expected to save more than \$740 million in health-care costs.

Professor Susan Hurley, the author of the new report published online in the international journal *Tobacco Control*, said the first six months of the National Tobacco Campaign in 1997 was the most intensive, and costly. "At the time the impact of the campaign was closely monitored and it was estimated that about 190,000 Australians quit smoking," she said.

Among the 190,000 people estimated to have quit smoking during the first six months of the campaign alone, almost 55,000 deaths and 57,000 cases of disease would be prevented.

Hobart Mercury, 26/8/08, p11

Detection: Two-stage test could save lives

Hundreds of Australian women's lives could be saved each year if doctors asked four simple questions in addition to a blood test already used to detect ovarian cancer in its early stages, researchers say.

By checking if women have new and persistent abdominal pain, bloating, difficulty eating or been feeling full, early detection rates could rise by 20% when combined with the CA125 blood test.

Scientists at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Washington have developed a questionnaire based on research that showed certain symptoms were significantly associated with ovarian cancer.

When used alone, the symptom index detected about 45% of women with early-stage ovarian cancer and 80% of those with advanced disease.

When the CA125 test is used, about 65% of early-stage and 90% of late-stage cases are found. Combining the two, about 80% of women in early stages and 95% of advanced cases are identified, the study of 254 women found.

Sun Herald, 24/8/08, p31

Obesity: Obesity shock threatens food ads

The Federal Government is under renewed pressure to ban junk food advertising aimed at children after a "tragic and frightening" report on obesity.

Greens leader Bob Brown said yesterday he would reintroduce the Democrat's Bill to crack down on the practice. He would seek support in the Senate from the Government and Opposition, which had "continually rejected" the Greens' amendment to ban junk food advertising during children's programs.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority is conducting a review of children's television standards. Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon would await its report before considering bans.

Canberra Times, 23/8/08, p3

Physical activity: A good workout can stop breast cancer

Young women who exercise 13 hours a week could lower their risk of breast cancer by up to 25%, research has revealed. The latest research shows the earlier a girl becomes active, the lower the risk of breast cancer before menopause.

The analysis of the effects of exercise on premenopausal breast cancer, involving 65,000 women found that those who were physically active from the age of 12 had a 23% lower risk of breast cancer. In particular, high levels of physical activity between 12 and 22 contributed most to the lower risk.

For the greatest reduction, 13 hours of walking a week is recommended or 3.25 hours of running.

The study, by researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and Harvard University in Boston, also found recreational activity reduced the risk.

Dr Helen Zorbas, CEO of the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, said, "There are a number of theories to explain this reduction in risk, including the effect of exercise on reducing a woman's exposure to estrogen, which is known to play a role in the development of breast cancer."

Daily Telegraph, 23/8/08, p9; Sunday Times, 24/8/08, p22

Research: Genetics reveal link to deadly children's cancer

International research has shed new light on the cause of a rare childhood cancer.

Neuroblastoma, which starts in the nervous system, accounts for about one in 10 childhood cancers and is one of the most deadly.

Until now its cause was unknown, however, research published today in the journal *Nature* has identified a gene responsible for the inherited form of the disease and may point the way to more effective treatments.

By the time neuroblastoma is diagnosed from a small, hard lump in the abdomen where the cancer is growing on top of a kidney, most children are at a very aggressive stage of the disease. The diagnosis usually comes after the child's first birthday, when fewer than a third can be cured.

In the study, an international team led from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia identified a particular mutated gene common to most children who inherited neuroblastoma. This cancer-causing mutation was also linked to the spontaneous form of the disease, making it a promising target for developing drugs to attack it.

Dr Paul Wood, from Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, said any treatment based on the research was a long way off.

West Australian, 25/8/08, p15; Age, 25/8/08, p5

Risk: 'Cancer risk' drug still on sale

A popular cholesterol drug – which could increase a patient's risk of cancer – will remain on Australian shelves pending a review by the federal drug watchdog.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration yesterday confirmed it would review research on cancer rates in patients taking Vytorin before determining further action.

The US Food and Drugs Administration announced it was investigating the medication last week after a trial found an increased risk of cancer.

But the TGA spokesman said patients should not stop taking the drug. "It is not yet known whether the finding regarding cancer rate is related to taking Vytorin."

Sunday Telegraph, 24/8/08, p21

Screening: Bowel screen program hits fund crisis

A national program to detect cases of Australia's second deadliest cancer is in danger of falling apart through under-funding and its promised reduction in deaths cannot be guaranteed, say leading specialists and architects of the Federal Government service. The bowel cancer screening program was launched in 2006, but the Government has not committed to recurrent screening of people whose first test was clear – raising the possibility of new tumours developing or cancers that were missed the first time progressing to a more dangerous stage.

Graeme Young, the head of Adelaide's Flinders Centre for Cancer Prevention and Control, said, "The evidence is very clear that you are meant to do the tests at a given frequency", of two years at most, to maximise the chance of finding the cancer when treatable.

Research shows two-yearly screening cuts deaths from the disease by up to one-third. Finlay Macrae, head of Royal Melbourne Hospital's department of colorectal medicine and genetics, said, "We have no confidence that one-off screening can deliver the same mortality reduction benefits promoted in the program."

A spokesman for the Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, said the program was being "phased in gradually to ensure...colonoscopy and treatment services are able to meet any increased demand."

But Professor Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia, said, "There's still plenty of capacity [in colonoscopy services]," and this was not a reason to delay rescreening.

Sydney Morning Herald, 25/8/08, p3

Skin: Melanoma grant

An international charity has given \$US1 million (\$A1.14 million) to Melbourne-led research targeting the "stem cell" behind melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. The New York-based Melanoma Research Alliance this week announced funding for "innovative, high-risk research".

The Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research at Austin Health in Melbourne was one of six groups around the world to receive three-year "team science funding".

Age, 23/8/08, p8

Detection: Scientists on the scent of new way to detect tumours

Scientists have revealed how odours from the skin can be used to detect tumours. Human skin emits hundreds of chemicals known as volatile organic compounds, many of which are odorous.

By comparing the chemicals released by the skin of healthy volunteers with those with basal cell carcinoma, the most common form of skin cancer, scientists were able to characterise the "smell" of the tumours.

The findings were presented at the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society in Philadelphia.

Age, 22/8/08, p9

Obesity: Obesity cost hits \$58b a year

The obesity crisis is costing Australia a staggering \$58 billion a year an alarming new report has warned.

Commissioned by Diabetes Australia, it also reveals a catastrophic flow on effect in rates of type 2 diabetes. The report estimates that 17.5% or 3.71 million Australians are now obese, including 290,000 children and teenagers aged 5 to 19.

Obesity was blamed for an extra 242,000 Australians with type 2 diabetes, 644,843 with cardiovascular disease, 422,274 with osteoarthritis and more than 30,000 with bowel, breast, uterine or kidney cancer, since 2005.

The findings coincide with a major obesity forum in Perth yesterday which called for measures including food regulations such as better labelling and a curb on the advertising and promotion of junk food.

West Australian, 22/8/08, p3; Hobart Mercury, 22/8/08, p11; Age, 22/8/08, p5; Australian, 22/8/08, p7; Herald Sun, 22/8/08, p25; Canberra Times, 22/8/08, p1; Sydney Morning Herald, 22/8/08, p9

Prevention: Reheat your spag bol for healthy living

Eating reheated spaghetti bolognese could reduce your risk of developing cancer. Scientists have discovered multiple rounds of heating – plus a little extra oil – enhances the health benefits of processed tomatoes.

The technique alters the structure of the tomato molecule lycopene so it is more easily carried into the bloodstream. Lycopene, a powerful antioxidant, has been shown to prevent cancers and also may help combat heart disease and diabetes.

Adelaide Advertiser, 22/8/08, p13; Hobart Mercury, 22/8/08, p31

Public Health: Cancer no longer the death sentence it was

Australia is winning the war against cancer, with those diagnosed now more likely to survive than succumb to the disease. An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report released today shows five-year cancer survival rates have risen about 30% since the mid-1980s.

Results from the latest available period, from 1998 to 2004, given men a 58% chance of surviving cancer for five years after a diagnosis, compared with 41% in 1982-86. Women have even better odds, at 64%, up from 53% in 1982-86.

Cancer Australia chief executive David Currow said the improvements stemmed from better screening and prevention, treatment and support. "The tide has turned and this represents a genuine improvement for all age groups, for women and for men, for cancer outcomes," he said.

Cancer Council Australian CEO Professor Ian Olver said cancer was now more of a chronic illness – one people lived with, such as diabetes or a heart condition – than a terminal disease.

"A lot of people still think cancer's a death sentence, and these figures are encouraging because they show you can live with cancer for many years."

Professor Olver said the greying of Australia's population had driven cancer diagnosis rates upwards, because the disease was strongly associated with age.

But the cancer death rate was flatlining despite an increase in new cases, he said. The first signs of a fall in diagnoses were starting to emerge, he said.

The biggest improvements in survival rates were recorded in the relatively common cancers of the prostate, breast and kidney and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. But far less progress has been made in more complex and aggressive tumours such as those of the lung, brain, pancreas and of unknown primary source.

The odds of beating the disease are influenced by who you are and where you live, as well as your type of cancer.

Rich people living in major cities have a much better chance of surviving cancer compared with those in poor and remote areas.

57% of Australians in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of the country survive cancer for more than five years, compared with 66% of those living in the wealthiest zones. It also found that people living in remote areas, particularly men, died of cancer earlier than their urban counterparts.

Professor Olver said the statistics revealed an urgent need for more screening and treatment services in rural and remote communities.

"The figures show we need to bridge that gap. There are solutions which governments could work towards. For example, in rural areas where the population is big enough, there could be rural cancer centres to give people access to the services they need".

The young are still more likely to fight off cancer than the elderly, but the greatest advances in survival rates since the mid-1980s have been among 50 to 59 year olds.

Screening programs for breast and cervical cancer have helped achieve those gains, with an expansion of bowel cancer screening now under way.

Australian, 22/8/08, p7; Canberra Times, 22/8/08, p4; Herald Sun, 22/8/08, p15; Adelaide Advertiser, 22/8/08, p13; Daily Telegraph, 22/8/08, p9; Hobart Mercury, 22/8/08, p2; Age, 22/8/08, p5

Risk: Hormone therapy warning

Doctors still warning Australian women to be cautious about hormone replacement therapy after a study revealed it could improve quality of life.

The study by the Women's International Study of Long Duration Oestrogen after Menopause found post-menopausal women using HRT had improved sleep and sexuality and less joint pain.

The study was released yesterday in the British Medical Journal. But its results have been criticised after the research was cut short due to concerns over HRT in the US. Prolonged use of HRT has been associated with increased risk of breast cancer and coronary heart disease.

Daily Telegraph, 22/8/08, p15; Hobart Mercury, 22/8/08, p5; Adelaide Advertiser, 22/8/08, p3; Herald Sun, 22/8/08, p25

Tobacco control: Car smoking ban to guard children (VIC)

Smoking in cars with children will be banned and school playgrounds will become smoke-free under new Victorian laws expected to be revealed today. People caught smoking in a vehicle carrying a child under 16 will face fines. Teachers and parents lighting up on school property could also be prosecuted.

Also under the new laws, cigarette sales will be banned at temporary outdoor events such as the Big Day Out and the spring racing carnival. Fruit-flavoured cigarettes will be banned in a crackdown on tobacco products that could appeal to children. Pregnant women who continue to smoke will be given support to help them quit.

Under Victoria's five-year Tobacco Control Strategy – expected to be announced by Health Minister Daniel Andrews today – displays in shops will be restricted but cigarettes will remain in view.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said it was vital that the Victorian Government removed cigarettes from sight and expanded smoke-free areas. "If the Government's main aim is to prevent young people starting to smoke, a partial ban, as favoured by the tobacco industry, will not achieve this result."

Age, 21/8/08, p9

Tobacco control: McGinty's smoking in car ban 'foolish' (WA)

Health Minister Jim McGinty has been rebuffed by police over his controversial plan to ban smoking in cars carrying children, with the Police Union warning the offence would not be a priority.

Union president Mike Dean said Mr McGinty's backflip on the issue was foolish and its enforcement would require hundreds of extra police. "I think it's obvious it's not practical and it's certainly not going to receive any priority from police given what they've got to do on an hourly basis," he said.

The ban on smoking in cars carrying children was one of a raft of restrictions announced yesterday by Mr McGinty, who also pledged to ban smoking in alfresco dining areas, children's playgrounds, on patrolled beaches within the flags and at State Parliament. Mr McGinty said yesterday police would enforce the car ban using existing resources, while the other bans would be policed by local council officers.

West Australian, 21/8/08, p1; Adelaide Advertiser, 21/8/08, p14

Treatment: Fruit juice can work against drugs, study shows

Grapefruit, orange and apple juices can harm the body's ability to absorb certain medications and make the drugs less effective, said a Canadian study released yesterday.

The research shows these juices can decrease the effectiveness of certain drugs used to treat heart disease, cancer, organ-transplant rejection and infection, "potentially wiping out their beneficial effects".

David Bailey, a professor of clinical pharmacology with the University of Western Ontario and leader of the study, said: "We discovered that grapefruit and these other fruit juices substantially decrease the oral absorption of certain drugs...The concern is loss of benefit of medications essential for the treatment of serious medical conditions."

Adelaide Advertiser, 21/8/08, p37; Courier Mail, 21/8/08, p20

Treatment: 'Glowing' cancer tumours set to help surgeons beat the disease

A revolutionary "cutting by colour" technique to make cancer surgery more precise and effective by making tumours "glow" is being developed.

Cancer surgeons currently have no clear way of knowing if they have removed all of the diseased tissue, which is key to successful surgery. Surgeons now plan to inject a dye into the body which makes diseased areas glow under an infrared light.

They can use the image to guide their incisions. The new system has been tested on lymph nodes and will now be adapted to highlight cancer.

The technique shows particular promise for improving surgery for breast, prostate and lung cancer, where the boundary of the tumours can be difficult to track at advanced stages, and ensure cancer surgeons avoid cutting critical structures such as blood vessels and nerves. In the future, fluorophores could be developed to highlight nerves and blood vessels in one colour while revealing cancer cells in a different colour, allowing multiple structures to be viewed easily and even simultaneously, said Dr John Frangioni of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre in Boston.

West Australian, 21/8/08, p13

Public health: Hospital scanner approval at last (TAS)

The State Government has finally given the go-ahead for the first PET scanner to be installed in a Tasmanian hospital. But the approval for the privately owned Positive Emission Tomography machine may end plans for a publicly owned PET scanner.

Health Minister Lara Giddings yesterday approved the scanner to be installed at the Hobart Private Hospital.

The go-ahead came after a threat by the company that owns the machine, MIA Tasmania, to move the life-saving scanner to an interstate hospital after lengthy delays in gaining approval. The Government denied any underhanded reason for delaying commissioning of the machine.

The machine measures the spread of cancers and was due to be operating this month.

Hobart Mercury, 20/8/08, p2

Public health: Cancer services 'close to collapse' (WA)

There is a looming crisis in WA cancer services because of an alarming shortage of medical specialists and equipment and long waiting lists for treatment such as chemotherapy, a damning independent review has found.

A Cancer Council-commissioned audit, prompted by patient complaints and funded partly by the WA Health Department, warns that unless urgent action is taken, the system could collapse within five years as it struggles to cope with an estimated 50,000 new cancer cases on top of the existing load.

The report, by University of New South Wales professor of radiation oncology Michael Barton, found that while cancer treatment in WA was usually of a high standard, inadequate facilities and staff shortages were major concerns. It also warned new cancer facilities such as those planned for the Fiona Stanley Hospital would not meet demand.

Professor Barton warned WA faced 10,000 new cancer cases a year, rising by 3 to 4% a year, but facilities and equipment were unable to cope.

Some high-cost treatments were available only to privately-insured patients or those willing to pay. And patients living in rural areas were at greater risk of missing out on vital treatment.

Professor Barton said that within 10 years the system would need an increase of almost 50% in services.

"The effect will be that patients will have longer waiting times and less access to services and the workforce will burn out and go elsewhere.

On the back of the findings, the Cancer Council WA called on the Government and Opposition to commit to upgrading cancer facilities and equipment urgently.

Health Minister Jim McGinty said cancer services in WA were high quality but acknowledged there was room for improvement. The WA cancer and Palliative Care Network was already addressing many of the recommendations in the report.

He said the \$65 million expansion of cancer services at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the building of the State's second comprehensive cancer centre at Fiona Stanley Hospital would provide easier access to treatment.

West Australian, 20/8/08, p1

Public health: \$4 million pledge for Bunbury

Health Minister Jim McGinty promised \$4 million for a breast cancer clinic in Bunbury yesterday. He said the new screening and assessment clinic, including a \$500,000 digital mammography machine, would be the first in regional WA.

If elected, Labor would set up the facilities by the end of 2009. Labor announced \$9 million funding for a \$15 million radiotherapy unit in Bunbury just before calling the election.

West Australian, 20/8/08, p7

Treatment: Brain tumour treatment hopes

Molecular screening and genetic profiling are expected to lead to better-targeted treatment and survival of patients with brain tumours.

Although relatively rare, brain cancers, diagnosed in around 1400 Australians each year and often at younger ages, rob the greatest number of years of life per patient of all cancers.

Neuro-oncologist Elizabeth Hovey, of Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital, said the latest research focused on uncovering the genetic code and molecular structure of individual tumours to help identify sequences that might indicate casual and risk factors, which remained poorly understood.

Identifying enzymes or proteins within a tumour that were over-expressed could help reveal the pathways that were amplified and where mutations had occurred.

Tumour profiling in this way was not frequently done, except in research, but it was hoped it may be developed in the future to give an indication of prognosis and lead to more specific prescription of chemotherapy drugs.

"We are trying to get better at this molecular profiling and genomic profiling to see if there are particular genetic signatures which predict the response to certain treatments," Dr Hovey said.

Although work was in progress, clinical applications were likely to be at least four or five years away. A new targeted agent, Avastin, that blocks blood vessel growth in brain tumours will be tested in an international trial, starting next year, in which Australia will be involved.

West Australian, 20/8/08, Health p6

Tobacco control: Electronic ciggies 'beat smoke bans'

Smokers could soon be able to switch on battery-powered "cigarettes" to get a nicotine fix without falling foul of smoking bans, with the Federal Government considering allowing the sale of electronic cigarettes.

The Government's peak drugs advisory body is examining who should be able to buy the so-called e-cigarettes and where they would be sold, the Therapeutic Goods Administration has confirmed.

Electronic cigarettes are not available on Australian shelves because of their nicotine content but a loophole exists allowing individuals to order them over the internet.

The devices, which look like traditional cigarettes, use a small heater to vaporise liquid nicotine into a fine mist for smokers to inhale. Instead of smelly smoke, smokers exhale steam.

Manufacturers market them as the healthier alternative to smoking because they do not contain the other harmful chemicals found in conventional cigarettes such as tar and carbon monoxide.

Distributor Albert Nisman claims because the cigarettes do not emit second-hand smoke or smell, they can be used in smoking prohibited areas.

A TGA spokeswoman said no application to sell electronic cigarettes had been lodged but there had been inquiries. She said provisional advice to the agency indicated they should be classified as a dangerous poison and be heavily controlled.

Australian Council on Smoking and Health president Mike Daube said people might try electronic cigarettes but would ultimately switch back to conventional cigarettes because they would miss the other elements of smoking, such as the smell of tobacco and the social interaction.

West Australian, 19/8/08, p15

Obesity: 'Tough measures' needed to beat obesity

Cancer experts have called for a hard-hitting approach to obesity, similar to the anti-tobacco campaign to stop the fat epidemic driving up breast and bowel cancer rates.

Cancer Council Australia says that while obesity is well-known to trigger Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and stroke, there is fast-growing evidence it is also contributing to Australia's growing cancer rates.

The organisation's CEO Professor Ian Olver, said, "Our cancer rates are going up because the population is getting older but as more Australians put on more weight it is going up even quicker. We need to recognise this now and act on it with tough measures to try to turn this around."

Studies show that 11% of bowel cancers and 9% of breast cancers can be blamed on

obesity. It has also been strongly linked to renal, thyroid, gall bladder and oesophageal cancers, and more weakly associated with melanoma, leukaemia and Hodgkin's disease. In an editorial in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia*, Professor Olver and colleague Paul Grogan said a multifaceted approach similar to the anti-tobacco campaign of the 1970s and 1980s was the best way to beat obesity.

"We really don't know what works for obesity so we can borrow from tobacco, because that was hugely successful," Professor Olver said.

Restrictions on junk food advertising to children should be the first move, bringing Australia into line with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development nations. A recent review by the Queensland University of Technology found the US and Australia had the worst policies on junk food advertising ads in the Western world.

Professor Olver said changes also needed to focus on improvements to product labelling, as well as a whole-of-government approach to fostering healthier communities that focused on nutrition and exercise.

"With an increasing incidence of cancer, now is the time for a range of tough decisions that will modify dietary behaviour and put public health before corporate interests."

Canberra Times, 18/8/08, p6; *West Australian*, 18/8/08, p18; *Herald Sun*, 18/8/08, p21; *Courier Mail*, 18/8/08, p12; *Hobart Mercury*, 18/8/08, p10

Prevention: Schoolgirls dodging cancer jab

More than 40,000 schoolgirls offered free Gardasil vaccinations at school opted out, figures show, as some parents worry about side-effects and promiscuous sex.

Official figures from NSW Health show 23% of the 173,607 girls enrolled in Years 7 to 10 did not participate in school-based vaccinations this year aimed at reducing the incidence of cervical cancer.

Yesterday, a newspaper reported on three cases of pancreatitis possibly linked to vaccination, although the matter has yet to be fully investigated.

CSL spokeswoman Rachel David said Gardasil was studied for almost 20 years before its release in Australia and its benefits greatly outweighed the risk of adverse effects from immunisation.

Daily Telegraph, 18/8/08, p14

Prevention: Diet lowers cancer risk

Men who eat more fruit and vegetables have less risk of developing a type of cancer of the oesophagus, a Japanese study has found.

The study monitored 39,000 men over eight years. It found that men who ate more fruit and vegetables had nearly half the risk of developing oesophageal squamous cell carcinoma.

Sunday Times, 17/8/08, p33

Public health: Science, patients taking the fight up to cancers

Cancer, the disease once viewed as a virtual death sentence, is becoming less invincible with the latest survival trends showing that more than six out of 10 Australians who develop cancer can expect to be alive and well five years after their diagnosis.

For some cancers such as breast, prostate and melanoma, survival rates are exceptionally high, hovering around 90%.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures show significant gains in five-year survival rates between 1982 and 2004, particularly in prostate, breast and kidney cancers and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

According to the Cancer Council of WA, more people across all age groups are now surviving cancer. The chances of beating cancer, once as low as 30%, are now around 90% for some of the most common cancers. The overall survival rate for cancer is 58% in men and 64% in women.

Director of education and research Terry Slevin said the trend was linked to improvements in cancer treatments and earlier diagnosis which gave patients a better chance of surviving.

The benefits of mammography in picking up breast cancers was paying off and the recent roll-out of the national bowel cancer screening program was likely to see survival rates improve even more.

West Australian, 16/8/08, p13

Risk: Desk jobs lift prostate risk

Men who work sitting at a desk are more likely to develop prostate cancer than manual workers, a study has shown. Scientists looked at whether levels of physical activity in the workplace were linked with tumours and found that having a desk job significantly increased the risks.

Men who worked as civil servants, teachers or in office jobs were much more likely to get cancer than those who spend much of their day on their feet, such as labourers, bakers, and barbers.

The findings, published in the *European Journal of Cancer Prevention*, confirm the benefits of regular exercise in reducing the risk of prostate cancer.

A team of researchers from the University of Athens studied 320 prostate cancer patients and compared them with a similar group of men free from the disease. All volunteers were questioned about the type of jobs they did and results revealed men in sedentary office jobs were 30% more likely to have prostate cancer and 40% more likely to have a non-cancerous condition called benign prostatic hyperplasia.

Courier Mail, 16/8/08, p3.

Skin: Melanoma survivors' risk lasts for life

Melanoma survivors are at a high risk of a second potentially deadly skin cancer and the danger stays with them for life, scientists have reported in the journal *Cancer Causes and Control*.

The risk was not only to people first diagnosed with invasive or aggressive melanomas but also to those who have very early, thin melanomas.

The WA Institute for Medical Research, Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control in Queensland and the University of Queensland school of population health study looked at more than 50,000 cases of melanoma.

WAIMR Associate Professor Lin Fritschi said, "During the decade after a melanoma diagnosis, six in every 100 melanoma patients will have a second melanoma". Men were more likely than women to have a second melanoma and the older they were at the first melanoma, the more likely they were to have a second.

Kieran McCaul, from the WA Centre for Health and Ageing said, "Currently, it is thought that most patients with melanomas less than one millimetre thick only need two years of follow-up after their diagnosis. However, we have shown that the risk does not decrease over time and people who have had one melanoma treated need to remain vigilant about their skin for life." *West Australian, 16/8/08, p13*

Tobacco control: Graphic new smoking ad

The most graphic anti-smoking ad yet will hit television screens across the state from tomorrow [Sunday]. The \$1 million ad campaign has been timed to run during the Beijing Olympic Games when millions of Australians are tuning in to watch athletes with bodies in peak physical condition.

Commercials aimed at a younger audience will be screened from 5.30pm until 8.30pm after which a no holds barred M-rated version will take over showing a "shock and awe" montage of smoking related diseases.

NSW Assistant Health Minister Verity Firth said, "This campaign will ask smokers directly why they still smoke despite everybody knowing tobacco causes cancer, stroke, heart disease and emphysema."

Daily Telegraph, 16/8/08, p19

Tobacco control: More smokers since ban in pubs, clubs (NSW)

Smoking bans in NSW pubs and clubs have coincided with a rise in the number of smokers in the state, rather than pushing smoking rates down as has been the trend overseas.

The increase has been blamed on lax enforcement of smoking bans – not a single fine has been issued for breaching the new rules – and the loose definition of an outdoor smoking area, where patrons can smoke as long as 25% of the space is open.

Research by the NSW Department of Health found there was a 0.9% increase in the prevalence of smoking in the state last year, despite the new laws being introduced in July 2007. The results reverse a long term trend in which the number of smokers has fallen by almost 6% since 1997.

A spokesman for Verity Firth, the assistant Health Minister (Cancer), said the ban was

introduced to protect staff and patrons from passive smoking and any resulting fall in smoking rates would be “a bonus”. The spokesman said the Health Department’s survey only took into account the first five months of the ban and said more data was needed to find a trend.

Sydney Morning Herald, 16/8/08, p8

Treatment: Patients free of cancer

Cancer patients have been left free of the disease after being treated with a new drug that harnesses the power of their own immune system.

Four out of 38 patients with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma saw the disease disappear, while five others saw reductions of 50% in their tumours. The drug, which could be cheaper than other similar therapies, works by activating the body’s own defences to attack the cancer.

The results have been described as a significant development in the use of immunotherapy, the process of using the body’s own immune system to fight disease.

While the trials were only carried out on patients with the blood cancer, it is hoped the method can be adapted to tackle other cancers.

Sydney Morning Herald, 16/8/08, p18

Treatment: Drug gives new hope in breast cancer fight

Tumours in women with advanced breast and ovarian cancer have shrunk by up to 50% in early trials of a new drug that is exciting researchers and has sparked an international race among pharmaceutical companies.

The drug would benefit women with inherited abnormalities in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 breast cancer suppressor genes – a group that currently has a 60-80% chance of developing breast cancer during their lives as well as a greatly increased risk of ovarian cancer.

In the longer term the drug, known as PARP inhibitor, could benefit up to 20% of women with breast cancer, including those who do not have an inherited abnormality, researchers say.

Recent clinical trials in Europe, the United States and Australia by pharmaceutical giant Astra Zeneca, involved women who were at death’s door with end-stage cancer. Most had been treated unsuccessfully with surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The PARP inhibitor reduced tumour sizes in 46% of the cases and 59% of the people in the trials recorded tumour shrinkage or stabilisation.

While the international trials involved just 63 people with advanced breast cancer and the same number with advanced ovarian cancer, researchers are buoyed by the results and further trials are under way.

Dr Gillian Mitchell, heads the familial cancer centre at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre which, together with the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, tested the drug. Dr Mitchell said she hoped the drug would be more generally available for people with cancer due to faulty BRCA1 and 2 genes in two to three years. She said at least three big pharmaceutical companies currently were conducting about 25 trials of PARP inhibitors and were in a global competition to develop a safe and effective drug.

Sunday Age, 17/8/08, p7

Nutrition: No medals for McDonald’s as health groups blast ads using Olympians

Leading WA health groups have joined forces to counter what they say are appalling McDonald’s adverts which use Olympic athletes to promote burgers, fries and shakes.

The health groups have created their own adverts featuring former Olympians Luc Longley and Jenn Morris, who dismiss the message that junk food is part of Olympic success.

The groups include the Cancer Council, Australian Medical Association and the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said there needed to be tougher regulation around junk food advertising, including a ban on the adverts during children’s TV programs.

West Australian, 15/8/08, p3

Public health: Don’t pin hopes on breakthrough ‘cures’

Reports about possible cancer cures could provide “false hope” to sufferers and their families, support groups say. In the past week, at least three major “breakthroughs” have been reported in Australia alone, each touting the possibility of an eventual cure.

It can take years or even decades, however, for new treatments to be developed and, even then, they might only be suitable for a small proportion of cancer sufferers.

Cancer Council SA chief executive Associate Professor Brenda Wilson said the cancer research results were “exciting” but warned it could take many years before patients saw the benefits. “It is fantastic that Australia and SA are delivering so many exciting cancer research findings. Across the country, millions of dollars are put into research each year and we are seeing real results with researchers continually developing improved methods of treatment and diagnosis,” she said.

“However, there are many types of cancer, requiring many different methods of research. Often, it takes many years before the results of medical research can be applied to patients. This is due to the level of testing and funding required to progress studies. Cancer Council SA relies on the support of the community to continue to fund research projects and prevention and support services for those living with cancer.”

Adelaide Advertiser, 15/8/08, p30

Skin: Skin creams linked to cancer

A controversial study has suggested some moisturising creams can increase the risk of skin cancer in people who were heavily exposed to sun as youngsters. But Australian disease experts say the study, which relied on tests performed on hairless rats, is inconclusive and unnecessarily alarmist, with no proof the findings apply to humans.

The US study found moisturisers containing known irritants such as sodium lauryl sulphate or mineral oil seemed to increase the rate of tumours in mice pre-exposed to high levels of ultraviolet rays. A custom-made cream not containing these ingredients did not increase the tumour rate.

Rutgers University lead researchers in chemical biology, Professor Allan Conney said his findings “could help explain the incidence of some types of skin cancer in patients”, especially those who have had a lot of sun exposure. But he acknowledged the results were only in rats, with the significance on humans still “unknown” and more studies needed.

Australian experts said the research, published in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, was premature, unhelpful and possibly irresponsible.

Australian Photobiology Testing Facility director Gavin Greenoak said, “The potential for alarmism is high, and therefore this paper invites the highest level of scrutiny, which it does not, in my view, sufficiently bear to warrant publication.”

Cancer Council Australia has called for more studies into the issue to better inform the public on the real risk of cream ingredients.

Canberra Times, 15/8/08, p3; Daily Telegraph, 15/8/08, p25; Adelaide Advertiser, 15/8/08, p26; Age, 15/8/08, p4

Prevention: Warning that free vaccines will end

The Cancer Council is urging women under 27 to get the cervical cancer vaccine soon before a Government program offering the jab for free ends next June.

The council also wants girls who may have missed out on the HPV vaccine at school to get inoculated before June 2009 when it will cost about \$400 for a course of three injections.

Cancer Council WA women’s cancer coordinator Pauline Pannell said the council was concerned some girls and eligible women might not realise that time was running out on the free program.

A new cervical cancer education DVD was launched by the council this week to ensure women had the most accurate information about the cancer. Called ‘Just a Minute: What do you know about Cervical Cancer?’, the seven-minute DVD informs women about the link between HPV and cervical cancer, the vaccination program and the importance of regular Pap smears.

West Australian, 14/8/08, p53

Tobacco control & Obesity: Rewards for cut in smoking

States may receive incentive payments for cutting smoking or obesity rates, under a federal proposal for health. Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday outlined potential changes to the system to the National Press Club in Canberra.

She said the Government could set a national target for reducing smoking. States which successfully implemented programs to reduce tobacco use could be rewarded.

“In Australia, we have a daily smoking rate of around 16%,” Ms Roxon said. “In California it is close to 9%. There is no reason why we should not aim to be the best. By tying incentives to outcomes, rather than just processes, you encourage innovation.”

“Other areas where this sort of approach could be applied include obesity, aiming perhaps to reduce the proportion of Australian children with unhealthy body weight to a certain percentage within a certain timeframe, say 5% with 10 years.”

Adelaide Advertiser, 14/8/08, p12; Courier Mail, 14/8/08, p7

Treatment: Combined drug win on breast tumours

In a breakthrough for breast cancer sufferers, British scientists have found a drug used to combat brittle bones can also have a dramatic effect on slowing down or killing the growth of tumours.

The researchers, from the University of Sheffield and Kuopio University in Finland, found two established drugs used to fight different conditions fought off breast tumours when used in combination.

A clinical trial is now under way in Britain which could lead to the treatment becoming widely available to patients worldwide.

The therapy involves the breast cancer chemotherapy agent doxorubicin and the bisphosphonate drug zoledronic acid, usually used to prevent bone thinning in osteoporosis patients.

A study, so far carried out only on mice, found the chemotherapy drug appeared to prime the tumour and make it sensitive to the bisphosphonate. Tests showed the treatment triggered a suicide response known as apoptosis in the cancer cells, causing them to self-destruct. It also blocked angiogenesis, the process by which blood vessels are created that fuel tumours with oxygen and nutrients.

Tumour growth was almost completely abolished in mice treated with doxorubicin, followed 24 hours later by zoledronic acid, the scientists have recorded.

Pamela Goldberg, chief executive of Britain's Breast Cancer Campaign, which funded the study, said, “The results of this study are very encouraging and could change the way breast cancer patients are treated. The good news is the two treatments are relatively inexpensive and already used in the clinic.”

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

Adelaide Advertiser, 14/8/08, p37; Herald Sun, 14/8/08, p4

Treatment: Hospital equipment 'decrepit' (WA)

The State Government faces a massive bill of almost \$100 million to replace decrepit medical equipment, including machines needed for dialysis and cancer treatment, a damning new audit has revealed.

A Monash University report commissioned by the Health Department shows the backlog of major equipment has almost doubled in size and replacement cost since 2006.

More than half of renal machines used for dialysis and a third of radiotherapy linear accelerators used for cancer treatment were classed as being past their use-by-date.

Shadow health minister Kim Hames said, “If you don't properly maintain and replace things when they get old you could have them failing during a critical operation or have extensive delays in treatment for people who might be dying of cancer.”

West Australian, 14/8/08, p3

Research: Brain tumour discovery

Australian researchers have found the origins of a fatal brain tumour in children, paving the way for life-saving drugs.

Medulloblastomas are the second most common cancer in Australian children and almost half of the one in 300,000 children diagnosed with the cancer die every year.

But in a world first, a team of Australian and American scientists have found the tumours can originate from two types of cell: stem cells and neurons.

“This is the first time someone has narrowed down exactly which cells it comes from, and if we're going to start treating a tumour effectively you have to know exactly where it comes from to begin with,” Professor Brandon Wainwright from the Institute for Molecular Bioscience at the University of Queensland said.

The discovery, published in the journal *Cancer Cell*, gives scientists a specific target. “Although current treatment is effectively successful in half of cases, there is often substantial damage to the brain from treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy as well. If we're going to tackle these childhood brain cancers, we need to be more targeted in our approach.”

Age, 13/8/08, p7

Risk: Playground poison alert

A scientist claims Australian children are at risk of ingesting cancer-causing poisons from thousands of picnic tables and other structures made from chemically treated timber in parks and playgrounds.

Copper chrome arsenate (CCA)-treated timber was banned in children's play equipment, outdoor seating and domestic decking three years ago because of the risk of contamination by potentially cancer-causing chemicals. CCA helps prevent rotting and insect attack. But the University of Wollongong's Sharon Beder is calling on councils to remove other CCA-treated equipment – such as tables, benches and bollards.

"Councils either need to do swipe tests to prove it is safe or take the precautionary approach and get rid of it," Professor Beder said. "Kids touch it and eat off tables and put their hands in their mouths."

US swipe tests have found high levels of arsenic in picnic tables.

In 2005, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority ruled that treated timber would be phased out by March 2006 in structures with which children might come into contact. It is still allowed in general construction, fencing, signage and telephone poles.

Courier Mail, 13/8/08, p19

Skin: Live longer in the sunshine

Fifteen minutes a day in the sun may contribute to a longer life by avoiding vitamin D deficiency, US research says. The study, by John Hopkins University showed poor diet and sedentary lifestyle contributed to vitamin D deficiency and people with it were 26% more likely to die prematurely.

Deficiency is a risk factor in diseases, including many forms of cancer. People engaging in physical activity and taking vitamin D supplements were less likely to suffer the deficiency. Endocrinologist Bronwyn Stuckey said the notion that Australia's warm climate meant that people had sufficient vitamin D was a myth. "We live inside, we drive to wherever we're going and a lot of us live in apartments."

Perth GP Joe Kosterich said: "You need the active form (from the sun). The problem for most people is they don't get conversion to the active form through 10 to 15 minutes of sunlight every day."

SunSmart messages to encourage people to "slip, slop, slap" could screen the benefits of ultraviolet light, he said.

West Australian, 13/8/08, p11

Research: Study reveals key to cancer

A family of enzymes has been revealed as one of the secrets behind benign tumours turning into cancerous killers. The discovery by Monash University researchers could pave the way for new treatments and offers a fresh insight into how cancer cells develop and mutate. The enzyme's pathways, known as protein tyrosine kinases (PTK), are found in the nucleus of almost all cells and are associated with several aggressive cancers, including colon, breast and lung.

Research leader Tony Tiganis, from the university's department of biochemistry and molecular biology, said the study showed PTK had a greater role than previously suspected. "It stops the proliferation of the cells when there is something wrong in the process of duplicating DNA," he said. "When there is something wrong with the enzyme it doesn't stop this duplication process, so potentially that could be a mechanism to contribute to tumour growth."

Drugs that work with the enzyme are used in late-stage cancer treatment, but Assoc Prof Tiganis said the timing could be changed following the latest discovery. "We already know that PTKs are associated with several types of aggressive cancers...What we have discovered is that PTKs have an important role to play as cancer cells grow and mutate to become potentially more aggressive tumours."

Results of the study are published in international journal *Cell Cancer* today.

Herald Sun, 12/8/08, p15

Tobacco control: Alfresco smoking ban ruled out (WA)

The Liberal Party has ruled out introducing a statewide ban on smoking in outdoor dining

areas and would instead leave the decision to individual councils.

Shadow health minister Kim Hames said yesterday he was happy for councils to implement smoking bans in public places. But in a move which reflected business sentiment, he said he was not interested in legislating for a blanket ban on smoking in alfresco areas, saying it was not a high priority.

West Australian, 12/8/08, p7

Treatment: Chemo crisis to hit ACT patients

Some cancer patients would be worse off and chemotherapy services could be plunged into crisis after the “tragic” closure of the cancer clinic at Canberra’s largest private hospital, a leading oncologist has warned.

Canberra oncologist Dr David Leong has spoken out to condemn the hierarchy’s “very cold” decision to axe the service. “It’s very likely to lead to a shortage of chemotherapy places [for private patients] in Canberra, and the public system is very much stretched to the limit. I can foresee that a crisis may well take place in the next three to six months as far as access to chemotherapy is concerned.”

Calvary John James Hospital will close its day oncology unit by the end of September.

Canberra Times, 12/8/08, p1

Prevention: Pill to turn back the clock

A drug that slows the ageing process and prevents cancer, heart disease and Alzheimer’s, could be on sale within five years, scientists claim.

The drug is made up of chemicals that mimic resveratrol a compound found in the skins of red grapes. Previous research has shown resveratrol reduces the impact of a high-fat diet, doubles stamina and extends the lifespan of mice.

Sirtris Pharmaceuticals has developed a pill based on two chemicals that act in the same way and the first human clinical trials have begun.

Sirtris co-founder David Sinclair said, “We will make a drug to treat one disease but it will, as an added bonus, protect you against most of the other diseases of the Western world.”

Sunday Herald Sun, 10/8/08, p34

Prevention: Cervical cancer vaccine boost

Melbourne is about to become the centre of efforts to vaccinate young Australian women against cervical cancer, with the opening today of the National Human Papillomavirus Register.

The register will record all HPV vaccinations from councils, schools, GPs and nurses around the country. The register will monitor the success of the vaccination program, and assess its impact on cancer rates. It will also issue reminders to women and girls who have missed part of their three-dose vaccination schedule.

It expects to start producing reports early next year.

Age, 11/8/08, p7

Research: Blood secret cracked

Melbourne scientists are hoping to cure leukemia, asthma and rheumatoid arthritis after their breakthrough discovery of how to stop killer white blood cells growing.

The team from St. Vincent’s Institute has not only unlocked the secrets behind the protein that controls the way the blood cancer cells spread when it is damaged, but has found a way to stop its deadly process. Work is now starting to design a drug to prevent the damaged protein operating, effectively stopping the cancer.

After spending a decade uncovering the structure of the receptor protein, which sits on the surface of white blood cells, lead researcher Professor Michael Parker said scientists could now build a drug to attach itself to the protein and stop it sending messages into the cells telling them to multiply unchecked.

“If we can stop the signal for the proliferation of uncontrolled growth of the cells then we can stop the leukemia in its tracks,” he said.

Working with molecular biologists at Adelaide’s Hanson Institute, the Melbourne scientists used X-ray and synchrotron imaging to build an image of the structure of the protein, hoping to find a way to block its process.

The GM-CSF hormone – which controls the production of blood cells in the body – works by

attaching itself to the receptor protein, which then sends a message into white blood cells telling them to multiply.

When damaged, the protein's messages cause an over-production of white blood cells, or cells that persist too long, resulting in diseases such as leukemia as well as some inflammatory conditions such as asthma and rheumatoid arthritis.

The breakthrough, which will be revealed in detail in leading medical journal *Cell*, came when the Melbourne researchers realised the proteins linked to form networks on the surface of white blood cells after being activated by the hormone, and that by stopping the networks forming they could stop the growth.

The institutes have now signed an agreement with Melbourne's CSL laboratories to design an antibody that can attach itself to the protein to interrupt the network and stop the cells multiplying.

Herald Sun, 11/8/08, p11; Adelaide Advertiser, 11/8/08, p13; Daily Telegraph, 11/8/08, p10

Research: Research finds cancer switch

Australian scientists have found a way to switch off a process that triggers breast cancer and some forms of leukemia. The discovery by researchers from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research opens the way for new drugs within the next decade.

Having transmitted a "transmitter" molecule that tells cancer cells to multiply and spread, the Sydney team then found a "shield" molecule which, in healthy people blocks that signal.

Lead researcher Professor Roger Daly said the discovery would lead to drugs that would mimic the natural shield, so the transmitter molecule could be turned off in cancer patients – effectively switching off the cancer.

"We have identified the process by which the cell is switched off. What we now have to get is the detailed structural information by which that occurs, and then we can develop drugs that mimic that process. The development of those drugs is probably five to ten years away."

It is hoped such drugs will be able to zero in on the exact molecules that cause breast cancer and some leukemias while producing fewer side effects than chemotherapy, which can damage a range of cells other than cancerous ones.

Herald Sun, 9/8/08, p17

Risk: Tumour worry in too many CT scans

Patients and GPs should avoid unnecessary CT scans or risk the chance of a higher incidence of tumours, a local radiological expert has warned.

Associate Professor Richard Fox, of the University of WA's school of physics, said CT scans had soared over the last 10 to 15 years because of technological advances that allow for quicker, more detailed imaging.

"That's the good news; the bad news is that there is a very small risk that a patient radiated with a CT scanner will as a result of that get a tumour in 10 to 15 years time and could potentially die of cancer."

Professor Fox said patients sometimes pressured doctors to send them for a scan and GPs acceded because of possible litigation.

"We need to avoid scans that aren't actually going to benefit the patient significantly or scans being done when a better technique – for example, ultrasound or magnetic resonance imaging – could tell you just as much or perhaps more without the radiation risk."

West Australian, 11/8/08, p19

Treatment: Calcium key to cancer cure

Calcium could be the key to a cure for prostate cancer, a Flinders Medical Centre researcher has found. Professor Greg Barritt has identified calcium as having an important role in the division and death of prostate cancer cells.

"The aim of our research is to better understand why some cancers become insensitive to hormone therapy treatments, and find a way to predict whether or not a cancer will spread."

If Professor Barritt discovers how calcium functions in cells, he could develop a way of predicting whether a cancer will spread, leading to new treatments for advanced prostate cancer.

Adelaide Advertiser, 11/8/08, p13

Public Health: Now our patients lose cancer clinic

ACT's largest private hospital – Calvary John James – will shut its day oncology service by

the end of September.

Cancer Council ACT chief executive Joan Bartlett said yesterday it was a "great shame" for patients who had relied on this service. Hospital chief executive Paul Robertson said the clinic was "unsustainable financially".

About 70 patients were using the service. Robertson believed most of the patients would continue treatment at National Capital Private Hospital, at Garran, or Zita Mary Clinic at Calvary Hospital, Bruce.

But some patients could end up at Canberra Hospital where there was spiralling demand for cancer services.

ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher has revealed plans for a third linear accelerator at Canberra Hospital. She said, "With full staffing, the new linear accelerator will increase the Canberra Hospital's capacity to provide radiation oncology services by 30%."

Canberra Times, 7/8/08, p1

Screening: Experts differ on prostate test for elderly men

Some prostate cancer experts have reacted with outrage to new claims that it is pointless to test over-75s for the disease. This week the influential US Preventive Services Task Force release guidelines saying the search for the disease in this age group was causing more harm than good.

The older a patient, the more likely it is that the test for prostate-specific antigens, known as the PSA test, diagnoses cancer that does not end up killing the patient. And operating on prostate cancer carries the risk of side effects such as incontinence and impotence.

Cabrini oncologist Dr Ian Haines, an outspoken campaigner against "over-hyped" drug and surgery treatments, welcomed the news. "I think it makes a lot of sense. We have caused a lot of trauma to a lot of elderly people... There's no data to support putting these people through the trauma of investigations and operations."

However one of the world's leading prostate cancer experts, in Melbourne this week for a conference, said the US group was misguided and Australia's resistance to PSA testing was dangerous to patients.

Dr Patrick Walsh, of the renowned John Hopkins Medical Institute in Baltimore, said, "You're behind in Australia, if you look at the number of people dying... you have got more deaths than you should have in 2008 and you should have many fewer deaths from prostate cancer than breast cancer."

He said resistance to PSA testing was coming from "people sitting in offices looking at statistics".

Age, 7/8/08, [5

Support: Chemo patients need more facts (UK)

Patients with incurable cancer are often poorly informed about the survival benefits of palliative chemotherapy before deciding to start treatment, researchers say.

A study of 37 consultations between oncologists and patients with advanced lung, pancreatic or colorectal cancers showed that discussion of survival benefit was "vague or non-existent" in 26 cases, according to a paper published online by the *BMJ*.

Researchers found that although all patients were informed that a cure was not being sought, none of the specialists in the UK hospital had a consistent approach to giving patients information about how much extra survival time palliative chemotherapy might bring.

Professor Jim Bishop, chief cancer officer and CEO of the Cancer Institute NSW, said, "Obviously the patient's perspective in a time of need might be different to a doctor's, so that's why it's always useful to give them as much information as possible to let them make an informed decision."

Australian Doctor, 8/8/08, p5

Treatment: Red tape delay for vital cancer scanner (TAS)

The plug may be pulled on Tasmania's first PET scanner before it even gets switched on. The State Government has been put on notice by the company that owns the Positron Emission Tomography scanner in the Hobart Private Hospital.

MIA Tasmania has confirmed it will move the multimillion dollar scanner to another hospital interstate if lengthy delays in obtaining a licence from the State Government are not sorted

out soon.

As MIA waits for the licence to be granted, the life-saving scanner sits idle in a crate and hundreds of cancer patients are forced to travel to Melbourne to gain treatment.

The machine, which measures how far cancers have spread and helps determine whether to operate or not, was due to be installed and up and running by this month.

Hobart Mercury, 7/8/08, p18

Treatment: Doctors balk at 'saviour sibling' bid

Doctors are hesitant to discuss the prospect of using IVF to create an HLA-matched 'saviour sibling' with the parents of a child with cancer, preliminary research suggests.

Some doctors believed that using pre-implantation genetic diagnosis to find an HLA-matched embryo commodified human life, research funded by the NSW Cancer Council found. They also had ethical concerns about telling parents about an expensive procedure they might not be able to afford.

Ms Kim Strong, a research at the University of Sydney's centre for values, ethics and law in medicine, interviewed 10 parents who made decisions about this technique, and 21 clinicians who have offered advice, including haematologists, oncologists, geneticists and immunologists.

Dr Andrew Penman, NSW Cancer Council CEO, said, "If there was an opportunity to provide a [stem cell] match through this means and that opportunity was denied because of misperceptions on the part of clinicians that would be regrettable."

Australian Doctor, 8/8/08, p12

Prevention: Alcohol-cancer debate: how much is too much?

Growing concerns over binge drinking and increasing evidence that alcohol is linked to cancer have put added heat into the debate about just how much is too much to drink.

The debate has been given new impetus after controversial draft guidelines for low-risk drinking from the National Health and Medical Research Council said both men and women should limit their intake to two standard drinks a day.

Even this is not good enough for the Cancer Council, which has argued tougher guidelines are needed, putting it on a collision course with the alcohol industry, which maintains there is no need to change the existing approach, under which men can have four drinks and women two.

Still in draft form, the final guidelines were to be released earlier this year. They are now expected to be released later this month or in early September.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said tougher advice was necessary and people needed to take note of alcohol-linked health problems.

The Cancer Council said the guideline for women needed to be halved, consistent with evidence on cancer risk associated with alcohol and International Agency for Research on Cancer findings released last November.

In the most thorough review of the cancer-alcohol link, the agency found any alcohol consumption could increase the risk of cancer and that men should have no more than two drinks a day and women one.

West Australian, 6/8/08, p18

Public Health: \$65m to expand cancer centre

A one-stop cancer treatment centre will be available by 2011 after the State Government committed \$65 million to expand the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Comprehensive Cancer Centre.

When completed, the expanded centre will be seven times the size of the existing building, treat 4000 patients a year and be the largest such facility in the State. Construction will begin next year.

West Australian, 6/8/08, p13

Risk: Agent Orange prostate link

Veterans exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange are twice as likely to get prostate cancer as other veterans, researchers from the University of California-Davis found in a study published

online by the journal *Cancer*.

Prostate cancer in those men also comes on earlier and is more aggressive, says Dr Karim Chaime, chief resident in urology at UC Davis and the study's lead author.

The findings are a clear signal that men who worked with Agent Orange should be cared for differently, getting earlier biopsies and more aggressive treatment, he says.

Courier Mail, 6/8/08, p12

Screening: Genetic tests rise and staff struggle

Genetic tests are being performed in such big numbers that there is a risk they will overwhelm the ability of doctors to keep up and swamp funding arrangements. That is the view of specialists after a survey revealed the extent of DNA testing in Australia.

A total of 160,000 tests were performed in 2006, according to the first national audit of the burgeoning field.

"We're in transition from a cottage industry to the inclusion of genetic testing in mainstream medicine," said Dr Graeme Suthers, who conducted the study funded by the federal Department of Health and Ageing.

8% of the tests were conducted on cancer cells to check for genetic damage. Tests on family members of people with cancer-causing gene mutations accounted for 5%.

Gene analysis of cancers was rising, said Dr Suthers, the head of the familial cancer unit at the South Australian Clinical Genetics Service, as evidence showed some drugs were more effective against tumours with particular genetic characteristics. "In women with breast cancer there's a good case for a genetic profile".

Bev Rowbotham, the president of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, said the survey results made a strong case to address funding for gene tests.

Sydney Morning Herald, 6/8/08, p3

Tobacco control: Smoking ban in city's alfresco areas approved

Perth City Council last night voted to push ahead with plans to ban smoking in alfresco areas in the city and Northbridge, immediately winning praise from anti-smoking lobby groups and condemnation from traders.

The council gave in-principle support to the ban at outdoor eating venues on council-controlled land including footpaths and kerbs by July next year.

Australian Medical Association WA president Geoff Dobb said smoking would now be banned in the State's two most popular alfresco areas, Northbridge and Fremantle, and urged that the ban be spread Statewide.

West Australian, 6/8/08, p6

Treatment: Vitamin C used to shrink tumours

Injections of high doses of vitamin C could hinder the growth of lethal ovarian and pancreatic cancers, according to American researchers who have found that the vitamin halved the size of tumours in mice.

Researchers at the National Institute of Health found that aggressive brain, ovarian and pancreatic tumours halved in size when mice were given injections of vitamin C in far greater concentrations than could be taken orally.

They said the findings, reported in the journal *Proceedings of that National Academy of Sciences*, suggested that vitamin C reacted to chemicals in cancer cells and generated hydrogen peroxide which caused the tumours to shrink.

The size of brain, ovarian and pancreatic tumours in mice shrank by 53%, while their growth slowed by 41%.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said the use of high doses of injected vitamin C as shown in the study was promising, particularly as it was in tumours with a traditionally poor prognosis.

West Australian, 6/8/08, p18; Age, 6/8/08, p10; Daily Telegraph, 6/8/08, p11

Public health: Women's cancers dominate the news

Television news is giving Australians a warped view of cancer rates by overpublicising cervical and breast cancer and largely ignoring cancers affecting men, researchers say.

An investigation of news and current affairs shows has found that cancers affecting women

and stories about female celebrities with cancer dominate cancer stories in the media. The Sydney researchers behind the work say the skewed publicity is giving the Australian public and politicians a confused view about the prevalence and severity of different cancers. A lecturer in the school of public health at the University of Sydney, Kevin McGeechan, said that, although men had higher incidence and mortality from all non-sex-specific forms of cancer than women, "the public face of cancer in our study was overwhelmingly female". The study, in the latest Medical Journal of Australia, found two cancers in particular were neglected by the media: lung and bowel. Bowel cancer killed more Australians than any other type of cancer and was the focus of a national screening campaign but it got just a third of the media coverage of cervical cancer, which had half the prevalence, Mr McGeechan said. "This imbalance in television reportage of cancer may be distorting political and community perceptions about which cancers are most prevalent and tractable and thereby deserving of government and community support, research investment and individual vigilance," he said. "For example, breast cancer attracts unparalleled research funding from individuals and governments, while other cancers causing more disability struggle to gain even a fraction of such support."

Canberra Times, 4/8/08, p4; Age, 4/8/08, p2; Australian, 4/8/08, p3; Hobart Mercury, 4/8/08, p6

Tobacco: Health twist in quit campaign (NSW)

The State Government hopes images of elite athletes competing at the Olympics will convince smokers to quit their deadly habit. A \$1.5 million anti-smoking campaign will be launched on Friday to take advantage of the 40% increase in TV audiences expected over the two-week-long Games.

In a twist, the new campaign will focus on the health benefits of quitting, rather than the damage caused by smoking, with the message "every day without cigarettes is doing you good" replacing "every cigarette is doing you damage".

Sun Herald, 3/8/08, p41

Treatment: Hope Clinic closes in wake of report

The controversial Hope Clinic, which has been charging cancer patients tens of thousands of dollars for dubious treatments for more than a decade, has shut its doors following a damning report into its practices.

Cancer Council Victoria's executive director, David Hill, welcomed the closure of the Hope Clinic, saying he hoped "the result is fewer people wasting their money on ineffective treatments".

The clinic's founder Noel Campbell, said he would establish an internet-based service to provide cancer patients with equipment so they could administer up to eight different therapies at home, with the help of their own doctors. The therapies have largely been dismissed as useless by most cancer experts. The home-based treatments would cost between \$5000 and \$10,000.

Sunday Age, 3/8/08, p3

Treatment: New drugs may make chemo obsolete

Chemotherapy could be made redundant by a new generation of drugs that stop cancerous cells in their tracks without the side effects usually associated with cancer treatment, according to one of Australia's leading haematologists.

Miles Prince, director of the Centre for Blood Cell Therapies at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, said the new drugs specifically targeted cancer cells and encouraged them to kill themselves by changing the environment of the cell growth and boosting the immune system.

He said the success of the antibodies, particularly in treating blood cancers such as leukaemia and lymphoma, had raised hopes that many cancers could be treated with a daily tablet and would no longer be considered a potentially fatal disease.

Herceptin, used commonly in breast cancer patients, was also an antibody used as an alternative, or to complement, chemotherapy.

"These new drugs have changed the whole landscape of how diseases are managed,"

Professor Prince said.
West Australian, 4/8/08, p18

Research: Cancer link

Radiation treatment has been linked with early on-set prostate cancer.
The study, at the University of Nottingham, showed that men who had had a hip or pelvic X-ray or barium enema 10 years previously were 2½ times more likely to develop prostate cancer than the general population.
And the link appeared to be stronger in men who had a family history of the disease.
Sydney Morning Herald, 17/07/08, p21

Screening: Breast checks don't cut risk of dying, landmark study finds

After decades of being told to examine their breasts for cancerous lumps, women will today be confronted with new research which shows that self-inspections do nothing to reduce their chance of dying of breast cancer.
An international team of doctors has concluded that breast self-examination does not reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer.
But Australian experts say the findings do not mean women should ignore changes to their breasts while showering or dressing because research shows this is how many early breast cancers are detected.
The latest review by the Cochrane research group, based on studies of 390,000 women in Russia and China, found that formal breast checks could sometimes do more harm than good by causing women to have unnecessary biopsies on harmless lumps.
Women who used breast self-examination had 3406 biopsies compared with 1856 biopsies in the group who did not check themselves, yet there was no significant difference in the rate of breast cancer deaths between the two groups.
Dr Jan Peter Kosters, from the Nordic Cochrane Centre, said screening by self-examination could no longer be recommended but women should always be encouraged to seek medical advice if they noticed any breast changes that could be cancer.
Director of National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Helen Zorbas said, "studies don't show a survival benefit in women taught to do breast examinations in a specific structured way relative to women not taught any technique."
West Australian, 17/07/08, p 1; Herald Sun, 17/07/08, p4

Screening: GPs rapped over bowel cancer role

GPs have come under fire as a new bowel cancer survey reveals that they are not raising the topic with patients at risk, according to Cancer Council Tasmania.
Cancer Council clinical liaison officer Dr Rob Brodribb said GPs were perfectly placed to educate their patients about bowel cancer, including what it is, what the symptoms are and how it can be prevented through screening and a healthy lifestyle.
The new Cancer Council Victoria study shows dangerous levels of ignorance among those at risk from bowel cancer.
"Nearly all bowel cancer cases can be cured if found early enough, yet this Cancer Council Victoria research shows a worrying level of ignorance about symptoms and prevention among those most at risk."
But AMA state president Professor Haydn Walters said GPs did a great job under difficult circumstances.
"The current system is based around short, sharp consultations. Having the time to cover broad health issues is hard as the current system is reactive rather than allowing for discussions on preventative issues."
He welcomed the Federal Government's move towards making preventative health a focus.

Hobart Mercury, 17/07/08. p 21

Skin: New grading system for skin cancer

The grading system for the skin cancer known as SCC (squamous-cell carcinoma) should be revised, according to a German study in the Lancet Oncology.

The revision should reflect their research which showed only thick tumours, greater than 2mm, were associated with a significant risk of metastasis over a four-year-follow-up period. They said SCC falls into three categories for metastasis risk: those less than 2mm have no detectable risk; those 2-6mm have a low risk and those greater than 6mm have a high risk and require investigation every three or four months.

Other risks include immuno-suppression and an SCC on the ear – but not the lip.

Australian Financial Review, 17/07/08, p66

Tobacco Control: Qantas to sell cigarettes on its overseas flights

Qantas has been slammed by anti-smoking groups for a decision to reintroduce cigarette sales on board international flights. In a letter to staff, the national airline has asked cabin crew to “prominently display” cigarettes on top of duty free trolleys.

Qantas says the move to offer three cigarette brands for sale on overseas flights was due to customer demand. It overturns the airline’s decision 10 years ago to remove cigarettes from its in-flight duty free range.

The policy, which came into effect on July 1, has been branded inconsistent with Qantas’ sponsorship of World Youth Day and children’s cancer charity Canteen.

Quit Victoria has described the decision as “backwards” and a “greedy cash grab” at the expense of people’s health.

Qantas Group general manager of customer product and services Lesley Grant said, “The availability of cigarettes reflects customer demand. We comply fully with all government regulations regarding the sale of all duty free products.”

Age, 17/07/08, p3; Australian, 17/07/08, p3; West Australian, 17/07/08, p9; Herald Sun, 17/07/08, p18; Hobart Mercury, 17/07/08, p3; Courier Mail, 17/07/07, p9; Daily Telegraph, 17/07/08, p14; Sydney Morning Herald, 17/07/08, p7; Northern Territory News, 17/07/08, p12; Canberra Times, 17/07/08, p7

Treatment: Red-tape costs threaten cancer drug

One of the biggest drug companies in Australia has warned that it could rethink its Australian marketing plans for a medicine for the terminally ill if hit with extra administrative costs because of a government policy change.

A budget decision to make pharmaceutical companies pay for a committee to decide whether their drugs warrant a public subsidy has raised fresh fears the industry will walk away from less profitable medicines because of the extra fees.

Wyeth Australia told a senate inquiry, in a submission released yesterday, that it will seek a public subsidy in November for its drug Relistor used to treat side-effects from opiates taken to relieve severe pain.

Bruce Shaw, national policy director of Palliative Care Australia, said he was worried the charges could end recent gains in getting medicines on the PBS for use by patients with terminal illnesses.

“It’s already an expensive and convoluted process to have drugs listed on the PBS and to add this additional hurdle, particularly one that saves only \$7 million over four years and costs \$2.5 million to implement, doesn’t seem to be very cost-effective”.

Peak industry group Medicines Australia estimates the new fees could add up to \$145,000 to the cost of listing a medicine, warning that children, cancer sufferers, the dying and indigenous Australians could be the first to lose access to drugs because of the change.

Australian, 17/07/07, p8

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.