

## DC On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

### Americans Gaining Mass

According to the latest government statistics, more than half of the U.S. population is overweight. A number of experts think the problem is even worse, arguing that the government standards for obesity are too lax. In either case, Americans are rapidly gaining mass. Ten years ago, eight percent less of the population would have been considered overweight by the current body-mass index standard. The BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight (in Kg) by their height (in meters) squared. A result of 25 or higher is considered obese. For the metrically challenged, the index can be computed by dividing your weight in pounds by your height in inches squared; then multiply by 703.<sup>1</sup>

1. Associated Press, October 15, 1996.

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### Canadian Health System Troubles

The Canadian health care system, frequently discussed in health care delivery debates, is again making the news. The Ontario Health Ministry has acknowledged that it sent a number of obstetrical patients across the U.S. border to a Detroit hospital for care because they were not able to get appointments to see a Canadian physician. Many doctors in Canada, upset about the workload and low reimbursements from the health system, are threatening to stop taking new patients altogether. The Ontario Medical Association says that obstetricians, working a typical 70 hours per week, average about \$35,900 a year in take-home pay.<sup>2</sup>

2. Associated Press, October 18, 1996.

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### Smoking and Babies' Lungs

An Australian study of 500 infants concludes that an expectant mother who smokes is more likely to give birth to a child with respiratory problems. This research is different from others relating smoke to a baby's breathing, in that it examined the effects of only smoking while the baby was in the womb. Other factors they found that affected lung function were maternal hypertension and a family history of asthma.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Lancet, October 19, 1996.

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### Human Game

A report published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report<sup>4</sup> blames improper clothing on a large percentage of accidental shootings of hunters. Of the hunters who are shot by another because he was mistaken for game, nearly every one had neglected to wear a "hunter orange" vest or jacket. Many hunters are also injured by stray bullets while hiding in bushes waiting for quarry, or when accidentally walking into the line of fire of someone who doesn't realize they are present.

4. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, October 17, 1996.

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#### Smoking-Cancer Mechanism

A molecular-level study published in the journal Science<sup>5</sup> claims to have found a direct link to cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Benzo(a)pyrene-metabolite, produced by the "tar" of cigarette smoke, was shown to damage certain sites on the p53 tumor suppressor gene. This damage is identical to that seen in 60 percent of lung cancers. The tumor suppressor gene guards against runaway cell replication.

5. Science, October 18, 1996.

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#### Hospital Embraces Alternative Therapies

Vancouver hospital has opened the Tzu Chi Institute for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, intending to blend western medical practices with traditional and non-mainstream treatments. Acupuncture, herbal remedies, aryuveda, and Chinese massage will be employed, among other therapies, for conditions such as cancer pain and Parkinson's disease. Vancouver is considered a good site for this experiment because of its large Asian population. Hospital officials think the time is ripe to start embracing alternative health care systems. The \$4 million endowment from the Taiwan-based Buddhist charity organization may have also been influential.<sup>6</sup>

6. Associated Press, October 20, 1996.

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#### Hormone Replacement Therapy Studied

According to Britain's Medical Research Council, they are about to launch the world's first study of the effects of long-term hormone replacement therapy in women. HRT, used by medical practitioners quite frequently as a treatment for menopause symptoms and osteoporosis, is said to protect against heart disease, but increase the risk of breast cancer. The 20 year study is expected to yield preliminary results in the year 2012.<sup>7</sup>

7. Reuter, November 3, 1996.

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#### Grumpy Old Men at Risk

A seven year study of coronary disease patients finds that anger can multiply the risk of a heart attack by three. The theory is that stress hormones affect the blood platelets in such a way as to

increase the likelihood of clotting. While other studies examined results of acute episodes of anger, this work looked at the long-term effect of anger-prone personalities.<sup>8</sup>

8. *Circulation*, November 1, 1996.

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### Strept Vaccines

In an effort to head off the impending wave of antibiotic-resistant infections, one epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control<sup>9</sup> is recommending that elderly persons and anyone with a chronic disease be inoculated for streptococcus pneumoniae at the same time they receive a flu shot. Strept p. is blamed for a very large number of meningitis, bacteremia, ear infections, and pneumonia. He blames the current state of bacterial resistance on patients who, at the slightest hint of illness, rush to ask their doctor for a shot of antibiotics. According to him, "People don't understand that a shot won't help with an upper respiratory viral infection."<sup>10</sup> Apparently, their doctors are afraid to tell them. (Who says the word doctor means "teacher"?)

9. Dr. Martin S. Cetron.

10. United Press, October 31, 1996.

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### Smoking Linked to Pancreatic Cancer

A study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*<sup>11</sup> reports that smokers have more than twice the risk of developing pancreatic cancer. Researchers followed their subjects for 16 years. Participants who quit smoking cut their incidence of the condition that kills 27,000 a year by one-half. After 10 years of abstinence, they were on par with non-smokers.

11. *AIM*, October 28, 1996.

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### Medicine on Wrong Track with Cancer

A joint commentary by British and Canadian doctors published in *The Lancet* medical journal<sup>12</sup> proposes that the idea of killing cancer with strong chemicals and radiation leads to a dead end and should be replaced. They suggest instead that since cancer is a regulatory disease, it should be approached from a perspective that cooperates more with the body. One of the writers says that the cancer disease process is actually quite sensitive to certain changes and can be reversed often without killing cancer cells.<sup>13</sup> He also notes that a particular anti-cancer drug works more effectively, though through a different mechanism, if given in much lower doses.

12. *The Lancet*, October 26, 1996.

13. Interview with Harvey Schipper by Reuter, October 25, 1996.

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### Drug Research Warnings Ignored

Doctors recklessly prescribe a popular antihypertensive drug, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.<sup>14</sup> The drug nifedipine, which has been documented to be not suitable for emergency situations, is still commonly used in such cases and can lead to an unpredictable loss of blood pressure. The result is often a stroke, heart attack, or death. The form of nifedipine (a calcium antagonist) that most concerns the writers is the fast-acting oral capsule.

14. JAMA, October 23, 1996.

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