

Dispatch: Cancer Screening, E-Cigs, First Lady on Food, Taxing "Pizza"

By ACSH Staff — March 18, 2010

Cancer Screening Déjà Vu

In its [coverage](#) [1] of a new blood test that is being billed as a method to detect colon cancer, *U.S. News* is appropriately skeptical: “But while the ColoMarker test may well have all the potential in the world, based on the information available so far, ‘it is unproven as a screening measure,’ writes Durado Brooks, director of prostate and colorectal cancer at the American Cancer Society...Like the highly controversial prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test, ColoMarker is a blood test that looks for a protein whose levels may be elevated in people with a certain cancer.”

“This new screening test is similar to the PSA test both in its method and in its shortcoming,” says ACSH’s Jeff Stier. “It detects a marker for cancer, but we don’t yet have the evidence that it helps prevent premature death. The cancer that it finds early may be slower growing and non-lethal. Still, the media has been picking up on this and calling it a breakthrough in screening. People are even saying that it will make colonoscopy obsolete. We have to give credit to *U.S. News* because some magazines have been overstating this.”

ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan agrees: “The bottom line is: if you’re over fifty, stick with the colonoscopy.”

Fear and Loathing at Vapefest 2010

The Tobacco Harm Reduction blog published the [story](#) [2] of ACSH’s friend and colleague Bill Godshall, Executive Director of Smokefree Pennsylvania. Godshall attended Vapefest 2010, the world’s largest gathering of electronic cigarette consumers (who prefer being called “vapers”) organized by the National Vapers Club.

“An e-cigarette is not a cigarette, and it is more than just a nicotine delivery device in that it replicates the feel of smoking a cigarette,” explains Stier, [who wrote about e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation product for Forbes.com](#) [3]. “It even has an LED light at the end.”

“There is no combustion involved,” adds Dr. Whelan, [who wrote about e-cigarettes for the Washington Times](#) [4]. “Nothing is burning, so it doesn’t pose the danger of real cigarettes.”

Godshall’s account is interesting: “My conversations with and observations of nearly all Vapefest 2010 participants revealed that: every vaper had been a cigarette smoker until they discovered vaping during the past year or two, nearly all vapers had been heavy smokers who had previously consumed one to three cigarette packs per day...nearly all vapers I spoke to indicated that their

breathing, taste, and smell had significantly improved, many vapers had unsuccessfully tried to quit smoking using nicotine gums, lozenges, patches, and/or other Rx drugs.”

“Although all these descriptions amount to a bunch of anecdotes now, we are optimistic that when real scientific studies are finally done, the harm reduction benefits of e-cigarettes will be confirmed,” says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. “Meanwhile, the ill-advised and politically motivated attempts by the FDA to preemptively ban them is counter to public health goals.”

Calling on Food Manufacturers

First Lady Michelle Obama praised members of the Grocery Manufacturers Association for reducing the calorie and salt content of some foods, but [she is still admonishing food manufacturers](#) ^[5] to work faster to reformulate and repackage food so that it is healthier for kids.

“Ms. Obama has taken this on as one of her causes,” says Dr. Whelan. “We applaud her interest in healthier food, but there is one point missing in her argument: food technology. There’s a great role that food technology can play in making food less caloric while still tasting good. There have already been breakthroughs with sugar substitutes, and more importantly, given the high concentration of calories in fats, there is tremendous potential for developing and using fat substitutes. We already have an effective and safe fat substitute, but tragically it is not being used widely, primarily because anti-industry food activists have made unsubstantiated health claims against it.”

“As we speak, Dr. Marion Nestle is asking, ‘[What are food companies doing about childhood obesity?](#)’ ^[6] on her Food Politics blog,” says Stier. “She doesn’t seem to like the fact that food manufacturers can make money as part of the anti-obesity campaign.”

Dr. Whelan adds, “We need to get back to the fact that food companies are like any company; they have to give the consumers what they want, or they’ll go out of business.”

A Pizza by Any Other Name...

Yesterday, ACSH Dispatch mentioned a proposed 18% tax on pizza, supposedly to reduce adults’ caloric intake.

“We had a robust reaction from our readers on that story,” says Dr. Whelan. “Most of them basically said, ‘Are these people crazy? It’s getting to be too much, how they single out individual foods as the cause of obesity.’ One obvious point that I didn’t mention yesterday is that pizza is very nutritious. It covers what used to be called the four basic food groups: dairy, meat, grains, and vegetables. To suggest that this is just empty calories is insane. So why are we taxing that and not taxing filet mignon? Oops! I’d better not give them any ideas!”

ACSH staffers were especially amused by an e-mail from Dr. Carl Phillips of [TobaccoHarmReduction.org](#) ^[7] suggesting how buyers and sellers might respond to such a tax: “I just laughed out loud at the pizza article in the ACSH Dispatch...Anyone with even a slight understanding of consumer economics...could tell you that a few cents tax on a can of Coke is unlikely to cause much avoidance behavior...But a high tax on ‘pizza’ -- what is wrong with these

people??! Do they not even live in the world? ‘Hello, I would like to place a delivery order for one large Circular Italian Flatbread Open-face Sandwich with pepperoni and mushrooms, please.’”

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Links

[1] <http://www.usnews.com/health/managing-your-healthcare/cancer/articles/2010/03/17/a-blood-test-for-colon-cancer-sounds-greatbut-its-short-on-proof.html>

[2] <http://smokles.wordpress.com/2010/03/17/bill-godshall-at-vapefest-2010/>

[3] <http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/09/barack-obama-smoking-fda-opinions-contributors-jeff-stier.html>

[4] <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/aug/06/fda-smoke-screen-on-e-cigarettes/>

[5]

http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100316/hl_nm/us_obesity_obama;_ylt=AtsBy8aEZmLkQCcIR7n8I_3VJRIF;_ylu=X3oD

[6] <http://www.foodpolitics.com/2010/03/what-are-food-companies-doing-about-childhood-obesity-2/>

[7] <http://www.tobaccoharmreduction.org/>