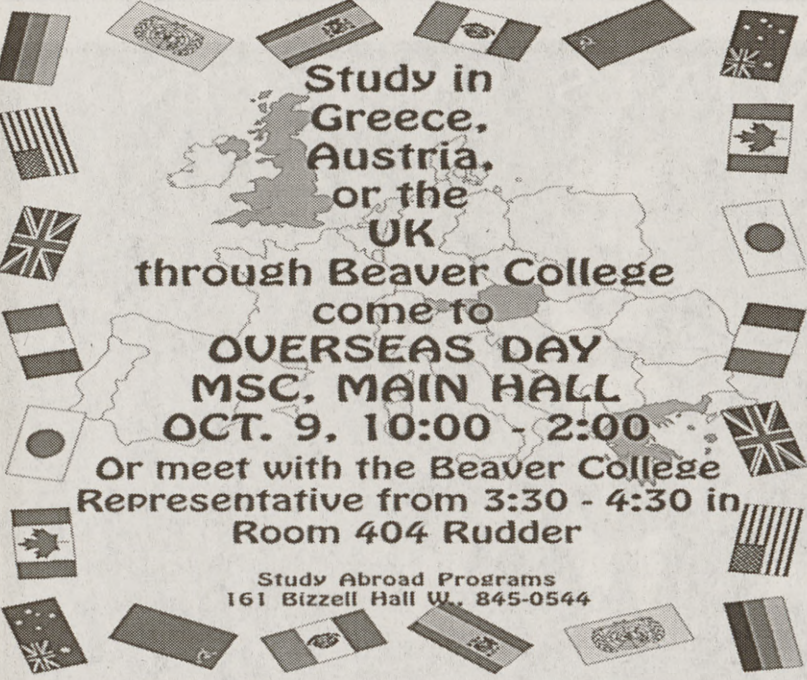


**The Veritas Forum  
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Texas A&M**

For Information,  
see page 5



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## Research questions cost of smoking

Conclusion does not support assumptions about impact on health care

BOSTON (AP) — Would health costs go down if everyone stopped smoking? Does cracking down on underage cigarette sales make teenagers smoke less?

If the answer to both questions seems like an obvious "yes," think again.

Two new studies show evidence to the contrary.

One study looked at the economic impact if every smoker went cold turkey tomorrow. The conclusion: Health care costs would drop for a while but would then inexorably rise for the simple reason nonsmokers live longer.

The other study found even with strict enforcement of laws against selling cigarettes to anyone under 18, teen-agers still can get them easily and smoke just as much, if not more.

Both works, published in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, challenge simple assumptions about the causes and consequences of smoking.

An estimated 3,000 children take up cigarettes each day in the United States. Making cigarettes harder to buy is the cornerstone of a new effort by the Food and Drug Administration to keep them out of the hands of teen-agers.

The FDA rules, which went into

effect last February, require stores to get photo identification from anyone who looks younger than 27. A federal goal is to have at least 80 percent of stores obey the laws.

Nevertheless, enforcement has received little testing to make sure it works. So a team led by Dr. Nancy A. Rigotti of Massachusetts General Hospital set out to compare high school students' access to cigarettes in six Massachusetts towns — three where tobacco sales laws were beginning to get strict enforcement and three where the laws were not enforced, even though underage sales were still illegal.

"It looks like keeping teen-agers from buying cigarettes will be more difficult than was first expected," Rigotti said. "Even when 80 percent of merchants obeyed the law, young people said they had little trouble buying."

The study was conducted from 1994 to 1996. In the enforcement towns, stores were barred from selling to youngsters under 18, but they did not have to ask for an ID from everyone who looked young.

The researchers tested compliance by sending 16-year-old girls into stores to buy cigarettes. The girls could not lie about their age or show fake IDs.

By the study's end, 18 percent of the stores in the towns with enforcement were still selling cigarettes to the decoys, compared with 55 percent in the other towns.

A survey of 17,603 high school students found enforcement did nothing to control teen-age smoking. Both before and after enforcement, 15 percent of students said they had bought cigarettes within the past month. After enforcement, the number of daily smokers actually rose slightly from 11 percent to 13 percent.

Rigotti said even a few stores willing to sell to teen-agers can supply many of those who want to smoke. Furthermore, stores that won't sell to the decoys sometimes still sell to youngsters they know.

"There is no one silver bullet," said Gregory Connolly, head of Massachusetts' tobacco control program. "Reduced access alone won't cure youth smoking."

Also needed, he said, are higher cigarette prices, antismoking campaigns in the media and stiffer clean-air rules.

The other study in the journal challenges the often-cited belief smoking drives up health costs, since it contributes to cancer, heart disease and lung disease.

## Crohn's disease treatment shows promise

BOSTON (AP) — Injections of an antibody that targets a natural human protein are showing promise in hard-to-treat cases of Crohn's disease, a chronic digestive illness.

The treatment involves injections of an antibody called cA2. The antibody neutralizes a protein known as tumor necrosis factor, thought to play a role in causing Crohn's disease.

The Associated Press first reported the development last year when it was presented at a medical conference in San Francisco. The study now is being published in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

The treatment, which is not yet approved for routine use, was developed by Centocor Inc. of Malvern, Pa. The company financed the study, which was conducted on 108 patients by Dr. Stephen R. Targan and colleagues from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in

Los Angeles.

Crohn's disease is an inflammation of the digestive tract. Symptoms can include diarrhea, pain, fever and weight loss. Some patients need surgery to remove damaged parts of their intestines.

All of the patients in the study had moderate to severe disease and had failed to respond to standard medicines.

A month after treatment, two-thirds of those getting cA2 showed considerable improvement, and half of those who improved got so much better doctors considered them to be in remission. After three months, the effects had begun to wear off, but 41 percent of the patients still were significantly better.

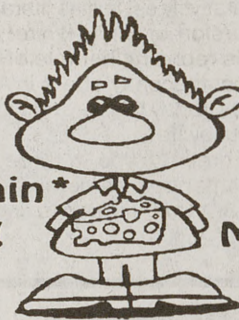

The treatment appears to carry no significant side effects. The researchers caution more testing will be necessary to see how long improvements last and to study the effects of repeat injections.

MSC TOWN HALL PRESENTS

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## Study finds new relief for Parkinson's

BOSTON (AP) — Burning a tiny hole deep within the brain can relieve some symptoms of Parkinson's disease for at least two years, a study found.

The approach, called pallidotomy, has received considerable attention in recent years. The latest study is among the largest to assess the operation.

The surgery relieves some of the symptoms of the disease, which can include tremors and stiffness as well as uncontrollable arm and leg movements triggered by the medications to treat the disease.

In the latest study, doctors treated 40 patients and followed them for up to two years. They found the patients showed significant improvement while taking medications while off them.

The doctors found that some of the benefits began to wear off after about a year. Patients still showed clear improvement two years later.

The target of the surgery is a pair of grape-size structures deep in the brain called globus pallidus. This part of the brain helps control movement and can be overactive in Parkinson's disease.

About half of the patients needed help taking care of themselves were able to live independently six months after surgery. Two years later, they were still able to feed and dress themselves.

It is unclear how long the benefits will last. However, a study from New York University reported that they may last at least four years.

The latest study was conducted by Dr. Anthony E. Lang and others from Toronto and was published in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

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CONTACT (PG) (DTS)  
FACE OFF (R) (ULTRA-STEREO)  
PICTURE PERFECT (PG-13) (DOLBY)  
NOTHING TO LOSE (R) (DOLBY)  
MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING (PG-13) (DOLBY)

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