THE DAILY CLIPS

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Study: CT scans raise cancer risk, often unjustifiably

By Marilyn Marchione
The Associated Press

Millions of Americans, especially children, are needlessly getting dangerous radiation from “super X-rays” that raise the risk of cancer and are increasingly used to diagnose medical problems, a new report warns.

In a few decades, as many as 2 percent of all cancers in the United States might be due to radiation from CT scans given now, according to the authors of the report.

Some experts say that estimate is overly alarming. But they agree with the need to curb these tests particularly in children, who are more susceptible to radiation and more likely to develop cancer from it.

“There are some serious concerns about the methodology used,” but the authors “have brought to attention some real serious potential public health issues,” said Dr. Arl Van Moore, head of the American College of Radiology’s board of chancellors.

The risk from a single CT, or computed tomography, scan to an individual is small. But “we are very concerned about the built-up public health risk over a long period of time,” said Eric J. Hall, who wrote the report with fellow Columbia University medical physicist David J. Brenner.

It was published in Thursday’s New England Journal of Medicine and paid for by federal grants.

The average American’s total radiation exposure has nearly doubled since 1980, largely because of CT scans. Medical radiation now accounts for more than half of the population’s total exposure; it used to be just one-sixth, and the top source was the normal background rate in the environment, from things like radon in soil and cosmic energy from the sun.

A previous study by the same scientists in 2001 led the federal Food and Drug Administration to recommend ways to limit scans and risks in children.

But CT use continued to soar. About 62 million scans were done in the U.S. last year, up from 3 million in 1980. More than 4 million were in children.

Since previous studies suggest that a third of all diagnostic tests are unnecessary, that means that 20 million adults and more than 1 million children getting CT scans are needlessly being put at risk, Brenner and Hall write.

Ultrasound and MRI, or magnetic resonance imaging, scans often are safer options that do not expose people to radiation, they contend.

CT scans became popular because they offer a quick, relatively cheap and painless way to get 3D pictures so detailed they give an almost surgical view into the body. Doctors use them to evaluate trauma, seizures, chronic headaches, kidney stones and other woes, especially in busy emergency rooms.

In kids, they are used to diagnose or rule out appendicitis.

But they put out a lot of radiation. A CT scan of the chest involves 10 to 15 millicurieverts (a measure of dose) versus 0.01 to 0.15 for a regular chest X-ray, 3 for a mammogram and a mere 0.005 for a dental X-ray.

The dose depends on the type of machine and the person — obese people require more radiation than slim ones — and the risk accumulates over a lifetime.

“Medical care in this country is naturally so fragmented. Any one doctor is not going to be aware of the fact that a particular patient has had three or four CT scans at some point in the past,” said Dr. Michael Lauer, prevention chief at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Many groups also condemn whole-body scans, often peddled by private practitioners as peace of mind to the worried well.
After stem-cell breakthrough, the real work begins

By Andrew Pollack
New York Times News Service

If stem-cell researchers were oil prospectors, it could be said that they struck a gusher last week. But to realize the potential boundless riches they now must figure out how to build refineries, pipelines and gas stations.

Biologists were electrified Nov. 20, when scientists in Japan and Wisconsin reported that they could turn human skin cells into cells that behave like embryonic stem cells, able to grow indefinitely and to potentially turn into any type of tissue in the body.

The discovery, if it holds up, would decisively solve the raw material problem. It should provide an unlimited supply of stem cells without the ethically controversial embryo destruction and the restrictions on federal financing that have impeded work on human embryonic cells.

But scientists still face the challenge of taking that abundant raw material and turning it into useful medical treatments, like replacement tissue for damaged hearts and brains. And that challenge will be rough as daunting for the new cells as it has been for the embryonic stem cells.

"Even though we have this nice new source of cells, it doesn't solve all the downstream problems of getting them into the body in useful form," said James A. Thomson of the University of Wisconsin, who led one of the teams that developed the stem-cell substitutes. Thomson was also the first to isolate human embryonic stem cells, about a decade ago.

Still, the new discovery should accelerate progress — if only because with the ethical issues seemingly out of the way, more scientists and money will be drawn to the field.

There are two ways that stem cells can lead to treatments for diseases. Making replacement tissues for failing organs is the direct way. But many scientists say the biggest impact of the new cells will be on the indirect way: using the cells to learn about diseases and then applying that knowledge to develop conventional drugs.

Using the new technique, scientists could take a skin cell from a person with a certain disease and generate stem cells. Those cells could then be turned into other cells, allowing the scientists to look at neurons from a person with Alzheimer’s disease, say, or heart cells from a person with heart failure. And a pharmaceutical company might get an early read on a new Alzheimer’s drug by trying it out on the newly created neurons.

"You cannot really go to a patient and say, 'I want to study your brain,'" said Dr. Lorenz Studer, who works on neural stem cells at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. "For the first time it gets us access to these cells."

Some scientists have been trying to make disease-specific embryonic cells by creating a cloned embryo of a person with the disease. But that effort requires women to undergo sometimes risky treatments to donate their eggs.

Some diseased cells, like those from a tumor biopsy, are already available for study, but those are from a person already sick. The new approach would allow scientists to watch the disease as it developed and potentially design drugs not just to treat it but to prevent it.

"This is a whole new way of thinking about how we might investigate human disease," said Kenneth S. Zaret, program leader for cell and developmental biology at the Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia.

Just this month, Israeli scientists reported in the journal Cell Stem Cell that they had created stem-cell lines from embryos donated by families with a history of fragile X syndrome, a disease that leads to mental retardation and is caused by the silencing of a particular gene. Studying the stem cells, they got a better understanding of when and how this silencing occurred.

Still, it is not yet clear how useful this new approach will be. Will a neuron from an Alzheimer’s pa-
CELLS
Continued from D1

tient have to sit in a petri dish for 70 years before it becomes diseased? Or, as is the case with some diseases, will the neurons have to interact with other types of cells?

Moreover, scientists already have many tools to figure out causes of disease — imaging systems that can peer into cells, knockout mice, genome studies. But it is not always easy to translate knowledge about a disease into a treatment. And even if it were, it still takes years of testing in animals and people before a drug can reach the market.

The gene responsible for Huntington’s disease was discovered in 1993, but there is still no cure. And the decoding of the human genome, contrary to some early expectations, has not led to a burst of new drugs, at least not yet.

When it comes to the direct approach, creating replacement cells and tissues for transplants, there are many challenges for both cells. Scientists do not envision transplanting embryonic stem cells themselves, either the real ones or the new close imitations, because they could turn into tumors inside the body.

So the idea is to differentiate the stem cells into specific types of cells. Scientists have made progress in creating some cell types, like the dopamine-producing neurons that might treat Parkinson’s disease. Other cell types are proving more difficult, like insulin-producing islet cells to treat diabetes.

The transplanted cells must be very pure, because any remnants of the original stem cells might turn into tumors, said Dr. Steven A. Goldman, a neurologist at the University of Rochester. He and colleagues implanted dopamine-producing neurons derived from human embryonic stem cells into mice with Parkinson’s disease. While their symptoms improved, they all got brain tumors.

Another challenge is to get the cells to hook up correctly with what is already in the body. Scientists at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden injected neural stem cells into rats with spinal cord injuries. The rats’ motor ability improved, but the implant prompted nerve growth in a way that made even a slight touch painful.

Despite the challenges, two biotechnology companies hope next year to begin the first clinical trials of therapies derived from human embryonic stem cells. Geron plans to test a type of neural cell as a treatment for spinal cord injuries, and Advanced Cell Technology wants to plant retinal epithelium cells into the eye to treat retina diseases.

The new cells have a big strike against them. They were made by inserting four genes into skin cells, causing the cells to revert back to a blank slate.

But the viruses used to carry the genes into the cells incorporate themselves into the cells’ DNA at random places, potentially causing mutations and cancers. And one of the genes used by the Japanese team is known to cause cancer.

The Food and Drug Administration “would never allow us to use those virally modified cells in patients,” said Dr. Robert Lanza, the chief scientific officer of Advanced Cell Technology.

Scientists are exploring ways to reprogram the skin cells without those viruses. But any genetically engineered cell is likely to face scrutiny from the drug agency.

On the other hand, the new cells have one advantage over the embryonic cells. Stem cells can be derived from a patient’s own skin cells, so tissue made from those stem cells would not be rejected by the immune system. Trying to do that with embryonic stem cells would require cloning.

Another possible advantage could be fewer intellectual property restrictions. Some scientists working with embryonic stem cells say their work has been encumbered by the requirement to get a license from the patent holder, the University of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin is applying for patent protection on the new technique but does not intend to require academic scientists to get a license.

“They can do it in their own lab,” said Carl E. Gulbransen, the managing director of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the university’s patenting arm. “They don’t have to tell me about it, and I don’t really have to know.”
Eye Openers

HIV/AIDS event

Sheryl Lee Ralph will present "Sometimes I Cry: The Lives, Loves and Losses of Women Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS" at 7 p.m. today in Wright Auditorium.

"Sometimes I Cry," written by Ralph, examines how women cope with HIV and AIDS.

The show is sponsored by the East Carolina University Office of Institutional Diversity, Student Health Services and the Pitt County Health Department.

Tickets are $15 for adults, $12 for ECU staff and faculty, free for the first 250 ECU students, then $5 per student.

A portion of the proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to the Pitt County AIDS Service Organization (PICASO).

Call 328-4788.
Students join GOP debate via YouTube

Nebraska teacher encourages his class to submit questions to the candidates for debate Wednesday

By Kathy Kiely
USA TODAY

When eight Republican presidential candidates met Wednesday to answer questions coming from citizen videos, the audience will include political activists, local VIPs and Ray Keller, a Nebraska teacher.

Keller, 36, got his coveted ticket to the St. Petersburg, Fla., event because executives of YouTube, co-sponsor with CNN of the debate, saw him as an exemplar of what they hoped to achieve with the forum’s innovative citizen-driven format.

According to Steve Grove, head of news and politics at YouTube, Keller is among scores of teachers who have encouraged students to submit questions to the candidates via the online video-uploading service. The student questioners run the gamut “from the middle school to graduate school,” Grove said. One entry is from a class of Harvard University medical students.

The student questions helped fuel a big surge of interest in the debate, which drew nearly 5,000 video questions by Sunday’s deadline, CNN spokeswoman Edie Emery said. That’s up from approximately 3,000 submissions for the Democratic debate in July.

Keller, who teaches government at Papillion-LaVista South High School in suburban Omaha, said that debate gave him the inspiration to use the GOP sequel as a project for his 120 students. “I thought, man, that’s a really cool way to get kids interested,” he said.

He said he proposed making GOP debate videos on the students’ first day back at school and “it really sparked their interest.” The students are juniors and seniors, and Keller estimates that at least 30% will be old enough to vote in next year’s election.

The students’ enthusiasm for the participatory video format is in contrast to the initial reaction from some in the GOP political establishment, who were cool to one of the clips used in the Democratic debate. That clip featured an animated snowman who asked a question about global warming.

“I think the presidency ought to be held at a higher level than having to answer questions from a snowman,” Mitt Romney told the New Hampshire Union Leader.

Romney plans to participate tomorrow. His campaign spokesman, Kevin Madden, said scheduling issues were the only reason his appearance was ever in doubt.

David Bohman, CNN’s executive producer of the presidential debates, said candidates are “a little out of their comfort zone when it comes to this debate.” Organizers, who plan to come up with a list of about 80 potential questions, promised the candidates that the selected videos “would be respectful,” Bohman said. There were 39
A question about homeless veterans: Fox Chapel Area High School students in Pittsburgh have a video for Sen. John McCain.

questions asked during the Democratic debate.

Still, organizers aren’t ruling out the debate.

“We did not promise there wouldn’t be a snowman or some sort of non-human character,” Bohrman said.

Keller’s students, working in teams of three, submitted 39 questions for the candidates. One group appeared on the school stage to ask a question about the future of arts programs in schools, Keller said.

Several cheerleaders dressed in uniform to ask a question about combating obesity.

The students have engaged in a lively discussion about their questions and politics on a class blog. The newfangled technology turns out to have had a salutary effect on good old-fashioned grammatical skills. “Their spelling gets better and better the more they post,” Keller said. “Peer pressure makes them proofread.”

Keller’s students will be watching the debate — and exchanging blog postings with their teacher — at a high-tech center run by their school district. “They’re very excited,” Keller said.

That’s exactly what debate organizers hoped would happen when they opened the floor to citizen videos. “This is their first taste of political action,” Grove said of the student questioners. “We hope it will keep them in the battle, certainly for the fall, but hopefully for the rest of their lives.”
We may be fat, but we’ve stopped getting fatter

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Obesity rates in U.S. women seem to be staying level, and the rate in men may be hitting a plateau, too, according to a government report released Wednesday.

With more than 72 million Americans counted as obese, adult obesity rates for both sexes seem to be holding at about 34 percent, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

The adult obesity rate has generally been climbing since 1980, when it was 15 percent.

The CDC’s new report is based on a comprehensive survey by the federal government that includes physical examinations. The results are based on what was found in about 4,400 adults ages 20 and older in 2005 and 2006.

About 33 percent of men and 35 percent of women were obese. The new rates were slightly higher than the 31 percent and 33 percent reported in 2003-2004 surveys.

However, in generalizing the results to the U.S. population, researchers calculated a margin of error that swallows up the differences between years. In other words, the increases were not considered statistically significant.

The obesity rate for women has been about steady since 1999-2000, at around 33 percent. But the male rate went up, from 27.5 percent in 1999-2000.
OUR VIEWS

College doors ...

With federal immigration policy still a mess, North Carolina community colleges stand at a tricky intersection.

Now that the uproar about illegal immigrants and New York State driver’s licenses has quieted a bit, along comes the North Carolina Community College System to take its share of abuse.

A memo this month from the system’s lawyer told the state’s 58 community colleges that illegal immigrants, if otherwise qualified, should be allowed to enroll. When news of the memo got out this week, Senate Republican leader Phil Berger promptly declared that the policy shift “will reward illegal activity” by “individuals who have broken the law.”

Yes, these are big-time lawbreakers indeed. The prospective students are, by and large, young adults who, having been brought (illegally) across the U.S. border as children, attended high schools (that’s legal) and now wish to further their educations at the community college level. Many, no doubt, have their eyes on getting a decent job in this country — also illegal, without proper documentation.

Surely these are people deserving of politicians’ most scornful press releases.

And besides, What Part of “Illegal” Don’t You Understand?

Scratch beneath the surface a bit, however, and you’ll find (as with the driver’s license situation) that there are two sides to the question.

Under federal law, illegal-immigrant children can attend public schools. Later on, if they meet admissions standards, they can attend universities. In North Carolina, but not some other states, such students must pay out-of-state tuition.

Up to now, a minority of North Carolina community colleges have admitted illegal immigrants to credit-course programs. All community colleges, apparently, have allowed their participation in continuing education or basic skills offerings. And some community college courses are offered in combination with high school programs, making certain high school students eligible for community college work.

The new policy is grounded in a 1997 legal opinion from the office of then-Attorney General Mike Easley. That opinion held that community colleges cannot impose non-academic criteria for admission.

The result is that illegal immigrants will be free to apply throughout the community college system — if they’re able to pay out-of-state tuition. For a full class load, the bill is about $7,500. That’s six times the in-state rate, and it reportedly exceeds by more than $2,000 the actual cost of providing the education.

Only the most motivated illegal immigrants would likely embark on such a project. And in fact the community college system reports that there were just 340 such applicants last year, out of a total of 270,000.

Think of it — 340 young people who, having grown up in difficult circumstances — care to trade places? — now wish to attend community colleges to improve themselves. Who want to learn new skills, improve their English, find out more about America and the world. Who quite likely were brought here as children, through no agency of their own, and who went through school and now want to become educated adults. Who could, depending on which path federal immigration policy ultimately takes, become legal residents of this nation of immigrants.

Bar the community college door?
... left out, left behind

Congress and the White House will need to solve the illegal immigrant problem eventually. But in the meantime there's much work that state and local governments must shoulder, particularly to keep young Hispanics from lives wasted in poverty or prison.

In North Carolina, Hispanic students drop out of school at rates higher than any other category. More than half of Hispanic girls are expected to be pregnant before they turn 20. A survey by UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Social Work, reported recently by The N&O, found that Hispanic youngsters often are scarred emotionally, live with uneducated parents in a culture that mandates education, and clearly get the message that they are not accepted in their new country, immigration status notwithstanding.

It's hardly surprising when demographics that dismal lead to bottom-of-the-barrel jobs, gangs and crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and other social ills. But to dismiss the harm, even when it involves someone who snuck across the border, suggests a lack of compassion that also is short-sighted. An incarcerated illegal immigrant costs taxpayers the same as a citizen. Teenage mothers are more apt to suffer complications during birth, with costs more likely to be paid from public funds when the mom is here illegally.

To some degree, crime, gangs and social upheaval have afflicted every nationality that has flooded into America. That history, in fact, offers hope, in the sense that ethnic minorities typically have adjusted to their new surroundings and flourished over time. That's one reason why the nation needs an encompassing approach to immigration reform. But until that legislation is passed, North Carolina can and should redouble its efforts to head off problems in the Hispanic community.

Triangle-area school districts, for instance, have fashioned programs to address dropouts, but more remains to be done. Anti-gang efforts need to be intensified, in concert with established Hispanic organizations. State and local health agencies' programs to discourage teen pregnancy could be adjusted to reach more Hispanic residents.

Certainly North Carolina cannot allow itself to stand by as vulnerable young people, far from home, are lost.
The People's Forum

The way things are

With all due respect to the UNC English professors and other educators who have complained in letters about Butch Davis's salary at UNC-Chapel Hill, no one is saying that a football game is more important than a student’s learning skills in English.

In a perfect world, teachers would be driven around in limousines and live in mansions while pro athletes and college and pro coaches would be the ones struggling to make ends meet. But the world is not perfect, so players and coaches make millions and teachers are underpaid.

Until 60,000 people are willing to pay high dollar on a Saturday afternoon to go to Kenan Stadium to hear an English professor lecture on William Shakespeare, that is the way it will stay. It may not be fair, but it is the way it is, and I, for one, accept that.

Jimmy Cox
Raleigh

Low expectations

Regarding the Nov. 24 article “UNC criticized for Davis' pay raise”: Do you think we can get the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees to oversee North Carolina’s ABCs of Education teacher bonus formula? It would be a real boon to teachers all across the state if all we had to do to earn a large salary increase was “buoy” our programs and get about 33 percent of our students to pass the End of Grade tests, rather than the 90-plus percent we need now to get our one-time bonus.

And if the board were in charge of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, principals in “low-performing” schools would no longer have to fear for their jobs; they could look forward to contract extensions instead.

Gretchen Daub
Chapel Hill

Big buck producer

Regarding your Nov. 24 article “UNC criticized for Davis' pay raise”: Former UNC president William Friday's complaint about football coach Butch Davis' salary is no different from the socialist Democrats whining about CEO compensation. I don't agree with the raise for Davis based on the performance of the Heels this season, but he is producing a product that brings big bucks to the university. What English or history professor can make the same claim?

Rick Lail
Vanceboro
Generous days at UNC-Chapel Hill

I know how Butch Davis feels. No matter how one tries to stop the rumors, they continue. In his case, it’s this darned rumor about the University of Arkansas giving Davis, the football coach at UNC-Chapel Hill, a come-hither look while dangling million-dollar bills out of its pockets. Arkansas, goes the rumor, is basically eager to have Davis come up and see it sometime.

Dick Baddour, athletic director in Chapel Hill and a man who was looking forward to a committed, long-term relationship with Davis when he signed Davis as football coach, knew he needed to show Davis how much he loved him (though he denied the Arkansas rumor had anything to do with it). So he gave Davis, after one season, a $291,000 raise and a one-year contract extension. But Davis now will be getting something over $2 million a year in compensation. He says he hasn’t talked to Arkansas, of course. Rumors, y’ know.

All the while, some critics have noted that Davis’ first season was a loser. And that his salary raise alone could hire more than two full professors or perhaps 10 part timers who typically do a lot of teaching. And that he makes more annually than the financial reward that comes with the Nobel Prize.

As I said, your correspondent knows how this goes. The CBS rumors continue, despite my best efforts to dampen them. A story has been going around that the network, desperate to rescue itself from the ratings problems with Katie Couric’s evening news, is seeking a person with star quality to replace her. My name, it is said, surfaced early. Then — just as with the backstories on Davis about how outsized pay for coaches is sending distressing messages about priorities and the seriousness of the academic mission in Chapel Hill — so the critics started in on me.

One reckoned, for example, that my hiring would send a distressing signal about the network emphasizing rugged good looks and sex appeal in its anchor rather than serious news judgment. It hurt, I gotta tell you. And then there was the story that I was using the flak from N&O to improve my N&O incumbency. Ridiculous, though some colleagues’ eyebrows were raised when I received a new telephone cord and two bright yellow highlighters. There is nothing to these rumors, I tell you.

For all the potential laughs that are there in this peculiar and outrageous tale of bad judgment in Chapel Hill, there’s very little that’s really funny about it. UNC-Chapel Hill presumably wants to be taken seriously, by its peers and its constituents. Contrary to what even some trustees are arguing, building a behemoth of an athletics program has very little to do with the standing of an academic institution in the places where standing counts.

Quick: Anybody know how Harvard did in football this year? Yale? Princeton? Are their trustees spending tens of millions of dollars on football facilities? Paying coaches in seven figures? Panicked that if they don’t start winning big they won’t get a bowl game and TV revenue? Highly doubtful. And, yes, it’s true that some top academic private and public institutions such as Stanford and Michigan and Notre Dame also have high-flying football programs. But there tends to be ebb and flow even then, and such cases are few and far between.

Chapel Hill trustees Chairman Roger Perry said of the raise and all: “It’s lamentable that that’s what it takes to compete. Unless we unilaterally disarm our program, we are going to have to stay competitive. ... This is an issue that’s much, much bigger than just us.”

What? Oh, yeah, the standard line that, gosh, we sure hate that we’ve gotta do it, but we’re going to do it. But Perry followed that with something about “unilateral” disarmament. Aw, c’mon. We’re playing Clemson, not invading it.

UNC system President Emeritus William Friday, whose good sense, national reputation and well-known personal integrity drive the sports boosters crazy when they get in a tussle like this, noted that the raise was “an increase far in excess of that presently provided the president [of UNC] or any chancellor and substantially greater than the yearly compensation of an English professor.”

Friday, former co-chairman of the Knight Commission that urged reform in college sports, believes universities remain infected by the big money from television and shoe contracts for coaches and the like.

So, no. This is not funny, not when academic leaders who ought to know better allow athletics officials to do whatever they want to in the name of the people’s university. They don’t own the place, although no one is apparently willing to tell them that.

Deputy editorial page editor Jim Jenkins can be reached at 829-4513 or at jenkins@newsobserver
On a campus where the golden leaf is studied avidly, smokers will soon be on the outs.

BY JOSH SHAFFER  STAFF WRITER
RALEIGH — Smokers can now lament losing one of North Carolina’s friendliest light-up spots, a place where tobacco is scrutinized, maximized and practically lionized.

Inside Williams Hall on N.C. State University’s campus, students can learn the chemical breakdown of the golden leaf, how to protect it from weeds and suckers, how to insure it against hailstorms, how to harvest it, cure it and trade it.

But they can’t smoke it.

Starting Jan. 1, nobody may smoke within 25 feet of a university building — even for research purposes.

“This is tobacco! We’re North Carolina!” protested Joyce Elias, who works in the Crop Sciences Department and enjoyed a smoke outside Williams Hall on Tuesday. “Tobacco was a major crop for many years, and we do research at N.C. State.”

Tobacco remains a major crop for the Tar Heel State. Its income ranked first in the country in 2006 at more than $506 million, even after the 2004 tobacco buyout slashed the state’s number of leaf growers.

That value comes nowhere near the $1 billion-plus produc-

tion North Carolina notched in the 1970s and ’80s — and as late as 1997.

But with the remaining farms increasing to giant size, tobacco still brings more money than any single agricultural product except broilers, turkeys, hogs and shrubs, flowers and trees grown in greenhouses or nurseries.

Crop science professor Ralph Dewey considered the contradiction between the new rules and the old mission of teaching the art and science of tobacco.

“I guess I never sat back to consider potential ironies,” he said. “It’s just the trend.”

Chancellor James Obinger sent a memo explaining the tightened smoking regulations late last week, keeping N.C. State in line with the General Assembly prohibiting smoking in state buildings this year — a ban that has few exceptions.

Residence halls that allow

SEE SMOKING, PAGE 48
Sorry, UNC tickets don’t come with the office

Democratic presidential hopeful John Edwards asked for the right to continue to purchase tickets to Carolina games when he was negotiating to create an anti-poverty center in Chapel Hill.

The request was disclosed when The Associated Press asked for e-mail messages surrounding the creation of the Center on Poverty Work and Opportunity at the University of North Carolina law school. Edwards created the center in early 2005 and headed it until he began his presidential campaign.

Edwards, who has been a season ticket holder for Carolina basketball games for many years, included a “ticket wish list” when a side was negotiating the creation of the poverty center.

UNC released Edwards’ contract and related information but declined to release the part of the e-mail referring to the wish list. Leslie Strohm, the UNC-Chapel Hill general counsel, said the information was withheld because it involved contract employment negotiations and because it included information on a man seeking admission to the law school.

Amanda Martin, the N.C. Press Association lawyer, said it was “absurd” for UNC to treat the ticket information as if it were a “state secret,” according to AP.

At any rate, UNC-CH didn’t agree. Senator Edwards received no tickets — and no promise of tickets — in connection with his university employment,” said Mike McFarland, a UNC spokesperson on Wednesday.

The Edwards campaign said the former senator was only trying to ensure the right to purchase tickets.

“Senator Edwards inquired about the possibility of continuing to purchase, in the future, season tickets as he has for many years,” said Colleen Murray, an Edwards campaign spokeswoman. “He was told by UNC that they could not guarantee that because circumstances change.”

Mayor isn’t giving up fight

Scotland Neck Mayor Robert Partin said Wednesday that he would appeal the Halifax County Board of Elections’ dismissal of his protest over the results of the town election.

Partin said he would appeal to the State Board of Elections. He seeks a new election in Scotland Neck, where he says he has uncovered irregularities.

Partin lost the election to James Mills, who is expected to be sworn in next month as Scotland Neck’s first African-American mayor.

“I am not a bitter loser,” Partin said. “I am an American that expects a fair and honest election.”

Partin said he knows of 15 voters who cited addresses of abandoned homes or vacant lots and 11 voters who actually live outside town limits. A high number of provisional votes also raise questions, Partin said, and he thinks there are dozens of voters who used inaccurate addresses.

On Tuesday, the Halifax County Board of Elections threw out Partin’s protest, while acknowledging one questionable provisional ballot and two voters who voted twice. The board’s decision said “there is not substantial evidence of any violation, irregularity, or misconduct sufficient to cast doubt on the results of the election.”

Lenders’ lampoon

Attorney General Roy Cooper has been blacklisted, but it’s really more like black humor.

His name was published on a Web site for the Predatory Lending Association, a mock trade group that poses as a resource for payday lenders.

The Web site lampoons predatory lending and credits Cooper for ridding North Carolina of major payday lending companies. Cooper has taken an aggressive stance against payday lenders in North Carolina by suing and prosecuting them.

“Mr. Cooper claims to ‘bust scams that prey on unsuspecting people,’ but his anti-competitive policies have busted our profits from predatory lending,” the Web site says.

The site lists Cooper and several opponents of predatory lending such as Martin Eakes, founder of the Center for Responsible Lending. Noelle Talley, spokeswoman for the Attorney General’s Office, called the blacklisting of Cooper “hilarious.”

The Kansas City Star published a story on the Web site this week, which was created by a Topeka native and former Microsoft employee.

By Rob Christensen, Jane Stancill
and Titan Barksdale.
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