

# MENTORING MINUTES

## YOUTH TOO STONED, TOO FAT TO JOIN MILITARY

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I am aware this newsletter is aimed for a wide diversity of interests in respect to my clients. However I thought war veterans may be interested by the following item. The Defence Force says that young Australians are becoming too drugged and too fat to join the military.

Overuse of recreational drugs—particularly marijuana—among 15 year olds and junk food related obesity are expected to worsen over the next decade, according to an Australian Defence Force (ADF) internal recruiting plan for the next five years, obtained by The Australian. “The high incidence of non-medical drug use among young people (recent studies suggesting up to 50 per cent of 15-year olds smoke marijuana at least one a month) severely

limits the pool of recruitable candidates,” the recruiting report says.

The childhood obesity problem is “expected to worsen over time as Australian society reflects the phenomenon found in developed nations”. The rate is “one of the highest among developed nations”, with 25 per cent of children assessed as overweight or obese, up from five per cent in 1965.

Increasingly unhealthy lifestyles—coupled with the ageing population and private section competition—is making it hard for the ADF to attract enough physically and mentally fit recruits to defend the nation, the newspaper says.

One in 12 military candidates already fail the physical or men-



tal fitness tests, and overall the ADF fell 1,000 short of its recruitment targets last year. By 2010, the ADF could shrink from about 52,000 personnel to 48,500—significantly below the 55,000 strong force planned by Defence Minister Robert Hill.

Senator Hill will unveil this week a strategy to expand the force to almost 55,000 to meet the challenges of the global war on terrorism, the newspaper says, with the army to recruit 2,500 more.

## DESTROYED BY DOPE

Again some parents and even psychologists might be interested in the following article in a recent Australian article. Anyone who argues that modern marijuana is a harmless recreational drug should read Jenny Downing's story in The Weekender. Ms Downing says she lost one son to mental illness, induced by his chronic consumption of the drug. Some children of the 70s who grew up occasionally smoking dope may find this surprising. They should listen to politicians as diverse as NSW Premier Mor-

ris lemma, his Victorian colleague, Steve Bracks and John Howard, who have all warned against marijuana since The Australian's major story on its dangers last month.

This is because the drug their children are consuming is much more potent and, as such, more evil in its effect than the one they used 30 years ago. And there is ample evidence of a connection between marijuana use and mental illness. This makes the case for tolerating—let alone legalising marijuana

far less credible than it was 20 years ago.

The first step in reducing the risk from dope is to convince parents that modern marijuana is harming their kids. Of course, the drug's defenders may say tobacco is legal even though it causes cancer and that an addiction to alcohol destroys lives. But this is to justify one danger by comparing it with others. And the evidence is obvious: there is nothing mellow about dope.

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**RESEARCH CONFIRMS STRESS MAKES YOU SICK**

Okay, so tell us something we don't know! Australian scientists have proven what many people have suspected for years: stress makes you sick.

Researchers at Sydney's Garvan Institute have discovered how a hormone known as neuropeptide Y (NPY), often released during times of stress, can prevent our immune system functioning properly.

The institute's Associate Professors Fabienne Mackay and Herbert Herzog said their findings, published in today's edition of the Journal of Experimental Medicine, prove a link between the brain and the immune system.

The research paves the way for understanding and preventing stress-related colds, flu, depression and even cancer, they said.

"Until now there has mostly been circumstantial evidence of a link between the brain and the immune system, but now we have that connection," Prof Mackay said.

"During periods of stress, nerves released a lot of NPY and it gets into the bloodstream, where it inhabits the cells in the immune system that look out for and destroy pathogens (bacteria and viruses) in the body."

The research also opens the

door for new opportunities for therapeutic intervention.

This discovery will be vital in helping us develop in people who have high levels of stress," Prof Mackay said.

"Under extreme periods of stress, the NPY hormone can also prevent our good TH1 cells (also known as "helper" cells) from attacking bacteria and viruses".

Prof Mackay said exploiting this TH1 inhibitory mechanism to prevent immune responses getting out of control would be essential in responding to diseases including rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, type 1 diabetes

and lupus.

She was quick to point out however that proper medication could take years to develop and there was a lot more to understand about stress and its effect on the immune system.

In the meantime, "it is important that we understand how bad stress is for all of us" Prof Mackay said.

"The best thing to do is to remove stress from our lives just by reorganizing the way we live, changing our lifestyle and using things like yoga and relaxation to the best of our ability".

"That stress makes you sick is no longer a myth and we need to take it seriously".

**ARGUING WITH YOUR SPOUSE MAKES YOU SICK!**

When married couples argue, the emotional scars might be just the beginning. Research in the latest issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry shows that the stress of a half-hour domestic dispute is enough to slow down the body's ability to heal itself from physical wounds by an entire day. The study included 42

healthy married couples, aged 22 to 77, who had been married for an average of 12.6years. Couples made two 24-hour visits to a hospital research unit. On the first visit, they were instructed to interact with each other in a supportive way, while on the second visit, they discussed a marital disagreement such as money, communication or in-

laws. A vacuum pump was used to produce blisters on each partners' arm, and the wounds were examined several times over the following 12 days. Researchers found that couples' wounds healed more slowly following the argument than after the supportive discussion. And couples who were highly hostile towards each other in both

sessions healed 60 per cent more slowly than couples with low levels of hostility.



**SPIRITUALITY**

Any number of people have asked me why I am a theist. The following is probably the most lucid explanation. "It seems to me in the last analysis there are only two choices, MacBeth's contention that life is a tale told by

an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing, and Pierre Teilhard's, " something is afoot in the universe, something that looks like gestation and birth". Either there is a plan and a purpose – and that plan and purpose can be ex-

pressed by the words "life and love" – or we live in a cruel arbitrary and deceptive cosmos in which our lives are a brief transition between two oblivions. The data are inconclusive as to these two choices, at least if we look at

the data from a rational, scientific standpoint.... I opt for hope, not as an irrational choice in the face of facts, but as a leap of faith in the goodness I have experienced in my life." (page171) Andrew Greeley as quoted in "Leading with Soul" Bolman & Deal 2001.