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## Tijuana Cancer Clinics Built on False Hopes

*California Sunday Magazine* | The charter bus leaves Los Angeles for Tijuana at the height of morning rush hour. **Frank Cousineau** does his best to keep his three dozen or so passengers entertained as they inch down the I-110. “On your left is the Staples Center,” he says over the scratchy P.A. system, “and all of downtown Los Angeles.” A few miles later, Cousineau, a 68-year-old grandfather with a light drawl and a thick mustache, hands out bran muffins and tucks into a topic closer to his audience’s interests: the supposed cancer-curing powers of hydrazine sulfate, a semitoxic chemical compound used to prevent corrosion in industrial processes.

For \$100 a person, Cousineau, who runs a nonprofit advocacy group called the Cancer Control Society (ccs), is **Tijuana, continued on page 2**

## Tobacco’s Grip on China: Follow the Smoking Trail

*Bloomberg Business* | **The China National Tobacco Corp.**, which serves China’s 300 million smokers, is by far the largest cigarette maker in the world. In 2013 it manufactured about 2.5 trillion cigarettes. Its next largest competitor, Philip Morris International (PM), produced 880 billion.

In terms of market share, China National is bigger than its next five competitors combined; its growing sales have accounted for a net increase in global production, even as volume at its competitors has fallen. While Marlboro remains the most popular cigarette in the world, China National boasts 7 of the top 10 brands, including Red Pagoda Mountain and Double Happiness. In all, the company made 43 out of every 100 cigarettes in the world last year, according to Euromonitor International. Despite its size, China National is little known outside of China: Almost all its cigarettes are sold in the country, where it has no real competition.

A conglomerate on the order of the old **China, continued on page 3**

## Video | Attack of the Killer K-Cups!

In the found-footage style of films like *Cloverfield* comes *Kill the K-Cup*, a short parody that features a giant, street-stompin’ creature made entirely of those one-off coffee-making capsules.



## CDC Vital Signs



The February 2015 issue of *Vital Signs* looks at second-hand smoke, which kills 41,000 adult non-smokers every year.

## Guess What’s Coming to Dinner? Salmonella

*The New Yorker* | Late one night in September of 2013, **Rick Schiller** awoke in bed with his right leg throbbing. Schiller, who is in his fifties, lives in San Jose, California. He had been feeling ill all week, and, as he reached under the covers, he found his leg hot to the touch. He struggled to sit upright, then turned on a light and pulled back the sheet. “My leg was about twice **Salmonella, continued on page 3**

## A Doctor’s Ship Offers Safe Harbor for Women

*The New York Times* | In June 2001, under a cloud-streaked sky, **Rebecca Gomperts** set out from the Dutch port of Scheveningen in a rented 110-foot ship bound for Ireland. Lashed to the deck was a shipping container, freshly painted light blue and stocked with packets of mifepristone (which used to be called RU-486) and misoprostol. The pills are given to women in the first trimester to induce a miscarriage. Medical abortion, as this procedure is called, had recently become available in the Netherlands. But use of misoprostol and mifepristone to end a pregnancy was illegal in Ireland, where abortion by any means remains against the law, with few **Ship, continued on page 2**

## A Perfect Storm for Poor Health

*The Atlantic* | **Donald Rose** has no teeth, but that’s not his biggest problem. A camouflage hat droops over his ancient, wire-framed glasses. He’s only 43, but he looks much older.

I met him one day in October as he sat on a tan metal folding chair in the hallway of Riverview School, one of the few schools—few buildings, really—in **Remote, continued on page 3**



The demand for alternative cancer treatment in Tijuana supports a cottage industry of entrepreneurs who offer consultations, housing transportation and even funding to desperate patients.

## Tijuana, continued

leading a tour of four alternative cancer clinics in Tijuana. My seatmate, a friendly and devout dentist named Nate Liu, has been on the tour before, after his wife developed breast cancer five years ago. She's currently taking an herbal regimen she obtained domestically, but Liu is curious about new treatments in Mexico. "Half the people on this bus are here for research, to bring help back to the U.S.," Liu tells me. "The other half are looking for a miracle cure."

"I just can't tell you how many people have recovered using hydrazine sulfate," Cousineau says as we hit cruising speed in Orange County. Since American distributors have been "persecuted by the FDA," he adds, the treatment is now only available outside of the U.S.

There is no hard data on the number of Americans who seek alternative cancer treatment at Tijuana's 20-some-odd clinics (though there is data showing that most of that treatment doesn't work), but it's high enough to support a cottage industry of entrepreneurs who offer consultation, transportation, housing, and even funding to desperate patients. Cousineau first learned about this world in the 1970s, when his mother was diagnosed with colon cancer. After she finished several punishing

bouts of chemotherapy, Cousineau took her to a clinic known today as Oasis of Hope, in the Playas neighborhood of Tijuana. During one of their stays, he met Rosario de los Ríos, nicknamed "Chayo," a secretary at the clinic whom he eventually married. His mother succumbed to the cancer, but Cousineau believes her death was more comfortable because of her time in Tijuana.

He dropped out of his teacher-training program and began working with the ccs, which was founded in 1973 by a lab technician and a health-food-store owner to promote alternative cancer treatments. In addition to the bus tours, the ccs hosts annual three-day conventions in Los Angeles, at a Sheraton next door to Universal Studios. Cousineau became president of the organization in 2006, and today, he and Chayo also run an herbal-supplement business from their home in Modesto and, for \$150 an hour, offer consulting services to patients interested in alternative care.

At a quarter to noon, the bus passes Dairy Mart Road, one of the last exits before I-5 terminates at the busiest border crossing in the world.

Read the **story**, more about **cancer** and get information on complementary and alternative medicine (**CAM**). ■

## Ship, continued

exceptions.

Gomperts is a general-practice physician and activist. She first assisted with an abortion 20 years ago on a trip to Guinea, just before she finished medical school in Amsterdam. Three years later, Gomperts went to work as a ship's doctor on a Greenpeace vessel. Landing in Mexico, she met a girl who was raising her younger siblings because her mother had died during a botched illegal abortion. When the ship traveled to Costa Rica and Panama, women told her about hardships they suffered because they didn't have access to the procedure. "It was not part of my medical training to talk about illegal abortion and the public-health impact it has," Gomperts told me this summer. "In those intense discussions with women, it really hit me."

When she returned to the Netherlands, Gomperts decided she wanted to figure out how to help women like the ones she had met. She did some legal and medical research and concluded that in a Dutch-registered ship governed by Dutch law, she could sail into the harbor of a country where abortion is illegal, take women on board, bring them into international waters, give them the pills at sea and send them home to miscarry. Calling the effort Women on Waves, she chose Dublin as her first destination.

Ten women each gave Gomperts 10,000 Dutch guilders (about \$5,500), part of the money needed to rent a boat and pay for a crew.

Read the **story**, and more on **contraception** and women's **reproductive health**. ■



## Who We Are

Hollywood, Health & Society, a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, is a free resource for entertainment writers working on storylines about health, health-care coverage and climate change. Funders have included the CDC, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Grantham Foundation, the Barr Foundation, The California Endowment, the Energy Foundation, ClimateWorks and the Skoll Global Threats Fund.

## China, continued

Gulf + Western, China National runs more than 160 cigarette brands, manufactured in about 100 factories across the country, and uses its earnings to invest in banks, luxury hotels, a hydroelectric plant, a golf course, and even drugmakers. Most of its money goes to its owner, the Chinese government; the tobacco industry accounts for about 7 percent of the state's revenue each year, and China National controls as much as 98 percent of the market. All told, the industry in China employs more than 500,000 Chinese. They are among roughly 20 million people who get some income from tobacco, including members of 1.3 million farming households and workers at 5 million retailers, according to government figures.

The extent to which the government is interlocked with the fortunes of China National might best be described by the company's presence in schools. Slogans over the entrances to sponsored elementary schools read, "Genius comes from hard work. Tobacco helps you become talented."



China National Tobacco Corp. serves 300 million Chinese smokers, making 2.5 trillion cigarettes a year.

The government runs China National as a largely opaque monopoly. The company has successfully blocked competition from Western tobacco makers by limiting imports or domestic production by foreign companies.

Read the **story, more** on tobacco use, the **health impact** of smoking, and a **guide** to quitting. ■

## Remote, continued

the coal-mining town of Grundy, Virginia. That day it was the site of a free clinic, the Remote Area Medical. Rose was there to get new glasses—he's on Medicare, which doesn't cover most vision services.

Remote Area Medical was founded in 1985 by Stan Brock, a 79-year-old Brit who wears a tan Air-Force-style uniform and formerly hosted a nature TV show called *Wild Kingdom*. Even after he spent time in the wilds of Guyana, Brock came to the conclusion that poor Americans needed access to medical care about as badly as the Guyanese did. Now Remote Area Medical holds 20 or so packed clinics all over the country each year, providing free checkups and services to low-income families who pour in from around the region.

When I pulled into the school parking lot, someone was sleeping in the small yellow car in the next space, fast-food wrappers spread out on the dashboard. Inside, the clinic's patrons looked more or less able-bodied. Most of the women were

overweight, and the majority of the people I talked to were missing some of their teeth. But they were walking and talking, or shuffling patiently along the beige halls as they waited for their names to be called. There weren't a lot of crutches and wheelchairs.

Yet many of the people in the surrounding county, Buchanan, derive their income from Social Security Disability Insurance, the government program for people who are deemed unfit for work because of permanent physical or mental wounds.

Along with neighboring counties, Buchanan has one of the highest percentages of adult disability recipients in the nation, according to a 2014 analysis by the Urban Institute's Stephan Lindner. Nearly 20 percent of the area's adult residents received government SSDI benefits in 2011, the most recent year Lindner was able to analyze.

Read the **story**, and find out more about **occupational health, black lung** disease and **Remote Area Medical**. ■

## Salmonella, continued

the normal size, maybe even three times," he told me. "And it was hard as a rock, and bright purple."

Schiller roused his fiancée, who helped him hobble to their car. He dropped into the passenger seat, but he couldn't bend his leg to fit it through the door. "So I tell her, 'Just grab it and shove it in,'" he recalled. "I almost passed out in pain."

At the hospital, five employees helped move Schiller from the car to a consulting room. When a doctor examined his leg, she warned him that it was so swollen there was a chance it might burst. She tried to remove fluid with a needle, but nothing came out. "So she goes in with a bigger needle—nothing comes out," Schiller said. "Then she goes in with a huge needle, like the size of a pencil lead—nothing comes out." When the doctor tugged on the plunger, the syringe filled with a chunky, meatlike substance. "And then she gasped," Schiller said.

That night, he drifted in and out of consciousness in his hospital room. His temperature rose to a hundred and three degrees and his right eye oozed fluid that crusted over his face. Schiller's doctors found that he had contracted a form of the salmonella bacterium, known as Salmonella Heidelberg, which triggered a cascade of conditions, including an inflamed colon and an acute form of arthritis. The source of the infection was most likely something he had eaten, but Schiller had no idea what. He spent four days in intensive care before he could stand again and navigate the hallways. On the fifth day, he went home, but the right side of his body still felt weak, trembly, and sore, and he suffered from constant headaches. His doctors warned that he might never fully recover.

Read the **story**, more on **salmonella**, and **guidelines** for keeping food safe. ■

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