



# CHARTING YOUR COURSE THROUGH THE LATEST MEDICAL ADVANCES

By Dr. Louis M. Cohen, MD

The first ten years of the 21st century have brought many innovations and technological advancements in the field of medicine. Some of these innovations have yielded immediate and direct patient benefits, while others hold promise for future help to those patients in need.

I will attempt to briefly summarize some of the medical triumphs during this past decade realizing that I will only be scratching the surface of a vast field of amazing technological innovation.

**Cardiology** has seen such rapid advancements in the field of stents that the rates of open heart surgery have plummeted in the past decade. We now have both bare metal and coated stents to fit a variety of circumstances and afford patients the most optimal chances of excellent results. Antiplatelet agents have come a long way from just aspirin and now offer combination therapy to better assure long term stent patency.

**Robotic Surgery** has sky rocketed to the forefront of several surgical scenarios. Prostatectomies for cancer can now be done robotically to afford the patient better chances at nerve sparing as well as sphincter control. Heart valve replacement and even artery bypasses can be done even more precisely and without the need for painful sternotomies thereby allowing rapid recoveries with less complications. Complete kidney resections can even be performed using robotic precision.

**Oncology** has seen an explosion in the armamentarium of chemotherapeutic agents now available to combat malignancies. Endothelial growth factor inhibitors, hormone receptor blockers and genetically directed chemotherapy have all risen from the pages of science fiction to reality. Cancer patients have seen significant survival benefits with these new agents.

**Infectious Disease** - Through the marvels of research in the field of infectious diseases, HIV infection has been transformed from a uniformly fatal disease to a chronic condition whose patients lead long productive lives and remain in the workforce for many years. It is truly a marvel of our healthcare system that we know so much about a disease that has been identified less than 25 years ago.

**Hypertension** - Each year, newer and better agents to treat elevated blood pressure arrive thanks to our medical researchers in academia as well as our magnificent pharmaceutical industry. Long gone are the days of using Phenobarbital for the treatment of hypertension. Today's agents are engineered and directed to lower blood pressure while avoiding the numerous side effects of prior therapeutics.

**Rheumatology** - Rising from the depths of the untreatable, the patients afflicted with crippling rheumatologic disorders have witnessed a new and exciting era in therapeutics. Monoclonal antibodies have forged a new frontier where not only can the debilitating pain of the diseases be treated, but also the joint destruction that afflicts these patients can be halted.

**Genetic Assays, The Human Genome Project, Stem Cell Research** - These modalities exist only in the labs of our researchers for now. The coming decades of the 21st century hold enormous promise in the field of medical therapeutics.

The treatment modalities noted above are but a few of the many medical "miracles" that have become realities in the past decade. So how does one successfully navigate the complexities of healthcare in the 21st century? You simply cannot go it alone! Now more than ever a team approach to healthcare is essential if one is to reap the benefits of these technological advances.

Choose a primary care physician with whom you can successfully partner for your healthcare concerns. In today's medical climate this is no easy task. The savvy patient needs to partner with a strong advocate who not only is an insider in the medical field but with whom they can also develop a close rapport. Asking the right questions and accessing the appropriate resources are essential to healthcare. If one successfully partners with a physician who is a strong champion for their patients, then benefiting from our technological advancements becomes a reality. 

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