



# Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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### MEDICAL PREDICTIONS FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

The repair of damaged hearts with molecular biological techniques and the prospect of general practitioners routinely working in teams with other health professionals are two of the predictions made in the current issue of *Australian Prescriber*.

Members of the journal's Executive Editorial Board - all experts in their fields - were invited to speculate on changes and innovations for the new millennium.

The predictions are:

#### **Cardiovascular medicine:**

- The total burden of heart disease on the health care system and on society will continue to increase, but by unlocking the secrets of the processes that control cell differentiation and division, scientists will soon be able to produce new heart muscle cells. "This will be the first step in a process which has the potential, in the longer term, to repair the damaged heart," says Professor PJ Fletcher, Director of the Cardiovascular Department at John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle, NSW.

#### **Pharmacology**

- Children have been identified as the therapeutic orphans of the end of the twentieth century, with only 20% of drugs licensed in Australia having paediatric information available. This century will see advances in the safe and efficacious use of medicines in children and adults.

Dr Noel Cranswick, Clinical Pharmacologist at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, predicts that the human genome project will define many of the differences that currently confound our use of drugs. Drugs and doses will be individualised depending on a person's genes.

#### **Geriatric medicine**

- There is concern that in future, we will survive longer, only to be disabled and therefore dependent on the rest of society. Dr Shanthi Kanagarajah, Head of Geriatric Medicine at the Illawarra Health Service in NSW, predicts that medical advances will reduce the proportion of disability due to disease, but that there will be a significant - and probably increasing - number of vulnerable and dependent elderly people.

#### **General Practice**

- This century is beginning as the last century did, with the bulk of medical care being delivered in general practice, according to Professor John Marley in the Department of General Practice

at the University of Adelaide. However, as the new century unfolds, he sees the uptake of computerised prescription writing becoming universal, and with it, much better decision support systems.

He also sees general practitioners working in teams with other health professionals doing tasks that medical practitioners do not need to do. This already happens in countries such as Canada and Holland, and is a liberation rather than a threat, says Professor Marley.

### **Psychiatry**

- Effective medicines have allowed the community management of patients who previously required prolonged hospitalisation, according to Associate Professor John Tiller, Director of the Academic Psychiatry Unit, Albert Road Clinic in Melbourne. In the new millennium, he sees hope for major improvements in the treatment of mental illness arising from the results of gene studies and the human genome project, better understanding of molecular biology, more effective drug design and improved drug evaluation.

Better community awareness of mental illness and more widespread psychological and social interventions may also improve outcomes with available treatments.

### **Oncology**

- As great advances have been made in reducing heart disease, the relative importance of cancer will increase, says Dr John Dowden, Editor of *Australian Prescriber*.

"I hope that by the end of the next century, we will be able to use the body's own immune system to fight cancer." Chemotherapy aims to destroy all dividing cells, in the hope that normal cells will recover faster than cancer cells. The ability to destroy abnormal cells while sparing normal tissues has strong appeal. Immunotherapy could be the way forward if we can find antibodies to knock out tumour cells.

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The current issue of *Australian Prescriber* also looks at everyday drug therapies affecting the kidneys, and advances in wound management.

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