

Despite our ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, political and other differences in identifying personal characteristics, there's one common denominator that concerns all of us: our health. And fortunately, 2017 was a very productive year for improvements in health care. This is good news for Florida residents because, although no Floridian appears or acts older than in the mid-50's, the latest census indicated that our state has the highest percentage of senior citizens in the Nation. That means a considerable number of us are in the "elderly" category and somewhat more susceptible to diseases. Any good news is welcome and the following are some of the major highlights.

A major blessing is the approval of bioabsorbable stents. Each year approximately 600,000 people have metal stents to treat coronary artery blockage. Those stents need not stay forever and, in fact, may cause the formation of blood clots. These new creations disappear in about two years, leaving a healthy artery and allowing many patients to discontinue blood thinners.

According to the American Cancer Society, more than 1.5 million new cases of cancer occurred last year. But advances in 2017 have elevated the usage of human T-cells to reenergize the patient's own immune system. These cells are engineered to recognize cancer cells and destroy them. In cases of acute lymphoblastic leukemia, for example, nearly 100 percent of those afflicted went into remission.

America's first successful uterine transplant produced a healthy baby, giving hope to those who have lost that organ due to cancer or other disease. This is a wonderful gift to families who desire to expand.

Since prevention is a major component of good health, there was excellent news that sales of home DNA testing kits exploded as millions of consumers sent in samples for testing – thus learning about their risks for specific disease entities and providing opportunity to take protective measures.

New drugs were approved for multiple sclerosis and ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). For those with MS, the drug dramatically reduces tremors, slurred speech, and blurred vision. In cases of ALS, the medication allows patients to walk, swallow, and breathe better on their own.

Those suffering from Type 2 Diabetes have also received good news by the discovery that a medication can reduce glucose levels in the body and increase the body's sensitivity to insulin for a healthier life.

Looking ahead, what's worrisome is the potential impact that Congressional budgetary cutbacks may have on the quantity and quality of research and the delivery system. With respect to delivery, The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act recently passed would have dramatically reduced Medicare payments, a system upon which many Florida residents depend at least in part for their health coverage. Fortunately, the AARP and other motivated groups convinced their legislative representatives to reverse that reduction – at least for 2018. It is therefore important that you are aware of pending actions which might negatively impact your future health and that you contact your elected officials when necessary. In my role I will join others within the Society to try to keep you informed. To your good health!!

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