

Fast Forward to Robo Health



Chris Zdeb, Journal Staff Writer

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Are you ready for a world where organ cloning is routine?

Where CyberDoc computers diagnose your aches and pains? Where surgically implanted devices similar to a pacemaker remedy the symptoms of epilepsy, Parkinson's tremors, chronic pain, incontinence and sleep apnea? Where, shades of Star Trek and Star Wars, doctors interact with life-size transparent holographs as if they were real patients? This is health care in the future and not that far away either, says American technology futurist James Canton, whose San Francisco think tank advises health care and pharmaceutical clients and governments, including provincial decision-makers on this side of the border. His book *Technofutures* details how leading-edge technology will transform business in the 21st century.

As early as 2003, in the States anyway, a few years later here, people will begin carrying a "smart card," a personal health history on a tiny chip detailing the drugs they've taken, medicines they're allergic to, diseases or conditions they've suffered. Hooked to the Net, the card will alert people to new research on a mutant genetic trait they've inherited, he says.

- The focus on preventive medicine and fitness will grow more intense, driven in part by people spending more time searching for health and medical information to prevent illness and support their good health. Internet 2, a faster, video-rich, more

essential Internet that will be wireless and a lot more personalized will help them do this, he says. What we now call telemedicine, supplementing care to people in remote and rural areas, will be simply medicine tomorrow, he says.

- Home care will become more efficient as remote patient monitoring over the Net becomes available. Chronically ill patients will be equipped with “nurse-bots” for 24-hour duty which will be able to take vital signs and transmit them using hand-held video conferencing devices to a central data base. A medical college in the States is already running trials with such monitors he says.

Like personal fitness trainers, people will soon have a personal health agent who will remind them to take their medicine if they're diabetic, tell them which restaurants to eat at that would support their health or help shape their healthy living with nutrition counseling or by getting them a second or third opinion about a particular medical problem, Canton says. Getting more people to take more responsibility for their own health will not only make health care more efficient, it will also make it more cost effective, he says.