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Medicine is the ultimate personalised technology

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Modern medicine combines science with the art of communicating and caring for individual patients. Talking with patients to identify the best clinical management has always been central to what clinicians do in all healthcare settings. That medicine is as much a science as an art in the 21st century is thanks to tremendous technological advances. The ability to characterise a tumour at the molecular level is already leading to less toxic treatments and advances in patient survival and quality of life.

We are in a fantastic era of big data, genomes, and population studies—this complex array of diagnostic tests and treatments puts more responsibility on clinicians to understand the options and explain them to patients.¹ McCartney mentions shortcuts to implementing technology, and uses the cytosponge as an example.² Cytosponge offers the possibility of bringing the diagnosis of reflux symptoms into the primary care setting. Because the cells it collects are coupled with molecular assays it has the potential to stratify patients at risk of oesophageal cancer—which is a lethal disease (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04wtqpp). Cytosponge is progressing through clinical trials spanning over 10 years encompassing measures of acceptability, accuracy, and health economics.^{3,4,5,6}

Catapult is trying to tackle the frequent delay between academic led trials and clinical implementation. Medicine has always offered a customised approach to patients, and the newly coined term “precision” or “personalised” medicine reflects the fact that our scientific armamentarium is starting to catch up with the art of individual care.

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Competing interests: RCF is named on patents pertaining to the cytosponge and associated assays that have been licensed by the Medical Research Council to Covidien (now Medtronic). RCF and PS are chief investigators on the BEST3 grant. PS has been on scientific advisory boards for companies that are interested in molecular diagnostics and is director of a clinical trials unit that runs trials in the area of stratified medicine (in rheumatoid arthritis).

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