

Six game-changers in the modern world of medicine

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It's quite fascinating to consider just how much medical technology has changed in the past two decades or so.

In 1995, the release of antiretroviral therapy dramatically increased the life expectancy of HIV-positive people, sometimes by as much as 50 years.

A few years ago, if you had a kidney stone it had to be painfully removed under surgery, but today it usually just requires a quick dose of non-invasive laser treatment, and you even get discharged the same day.

Part of this success is because most governments spend billions of dollars on medical research and developments each year. In South Africa alone, the South African Medical Research Council has budgeted a total of R1bn for medical research in 2017.



Some of the ground-breaking results of this investment in recent years, both locally and abroad, include:

1. First heart and kidney transplant in SA

A team of specialists successfully performed the [first heart and kidney transplant](#) in South Africa in 2016. "Most South Africans are probably not aware of just how active transplant programmes are," says Dr. Graham Cassel, part of the transplant team. Approximately 4,300 people in South Africa are waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant every year, but only about 600 transplants are performed due to lack of donors.

2. Switch to digital platforms to manage healthcare

Unlike most countries in Africa, the healthcare system in South Africa is almost entirely digital. RecoMed, a mobile and web-based healthcare booking platform, helps patients find doctors anywhere in the country and instantly book

appointments 24/7.

Medpages is another local brand serving patients all over Africa. Also known as the yellow pages for healthcare providers online, it's the largest online directory of healthcare practitioners and helps patients find contact details of medical services near them.

Another digital booster of healthcare in SA is FOLUP, a health communication platform. This service provides patients with a secure platform on which they can actively participate in their health management processes.

3. No more pain pills

Good news for chronic pain sufferers, soon there will be an alternative for taking pills. Researchers have developed the [first painkiller patch](#), which targets specific pain areas and releases Ibuprofen in a constant dose for up to 12 hours. Next time you have shin splints, simply pop a patch on the affected area for fast relief.

4. Aids-fighting condom

It's already a breakthrough to have condoms change colour when detecting STDs, but now researchers have taken it up a level by developing a [condom](#) that contains Aids-fighting antioxidants to provide additional protection if it breaks.

5. Male birth control injection

Already on the market are birth control pills for men, but research shows a lot of women don't trust their partners to religiously take their pills. However, researchers are currently developing a [birth control shot](#) for men. This only needs to be given every eight weeks, and research has found the shot to be almost as effective as the Pill.

6. Shrinking cancer

The greatest mystery in the medical world persists, but while researchers are still trying to find a cure for cancer, developments have been made to reduce spreading of the sickness within the body.

The challenge with cancer is that a protein sits on the surface of the cancer cell which "disguises" the cell from the immune system. The immune system can't fight the cancer cell, because it doesn't realise it's there. Researchers are now working on a [drug](#) that binds to the protein, reveals the cancer cell and ultimately allows your immune system to destroy it.

With the rapidly evolving technology we have today the opportunities are endless. Here's looking forward to the next 10 years of medical magic.

ABOUT SURIKE VIVIERS

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