

## The Benefits of Immortality

**Increasing human life-spans by several decades could save trillions of dollars in medical costs as we wipe out heart disease, cancer, and other maladies.**

By Ronald M. Klatz

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To reach human immortality we must follow Rule #1 of antiaging medicine: Don't die.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, once we reach age 65, men can expect to live an additional 15.8 years, and women can expect an additional 17.6 years. That's enough to bridge the gap between medical knowledge of today and the medical knowledge we will have in our grasp in 10 years, thanks to the work of the Human Genome Project, stem-cell research, and nanotechnology. We will then begin to realize the fruits of this endeavor by achieving the technology necessary to accomplish mankind's oldest wish: practical immortality—life-spans of 200 years and beyond. Those physicians and scientists providing for the safe and effective means for both the very early detection and the aggressive yet gentle treatment of disease, whether they brand themselves as such or not, are in fact practicing the newest and fastest-growing medical specialty—antiaging health care. In this capacity, these medical visionaries serve as the expert navigators for this newly created optimal health and maximum human life-span.

The coming double-centenarian human life-span will redefine the socioeconomic order. Accompanying a trend of overall extended life-span, humankind will evolve toward an Ageless Society, in which we all experience boundless physical and mental vitality. We will gladly follow three to four careers per lifetime, with ample leisure along the way.

### **The Financial Benefit Of Longevity**

Longevity profoundly alters the economic framework of every nation in which residents are living longer. Until we've eradicated the age-related decline in health that leads to many of us becoming dependent and disabled in our older years, society will bear increasing financial costs to sustain the older population.

Old-age dependency rates will rise in every major world region during the next 25 years. In the absence of scientific solutions that halt the onset of the degenerative diseases of aging, the elderly support burden in the year 2025 will be 50% larger than that in 1998.

So, just how much are our extra years of life worth? Kevin Murphy and Robert Topel of the University of Chicago Business School used a value per-life of \$5 million (extrapolated from accident payouts by insurers) to calculate what the six years' gain in average life expectancy during 1970–1990 alone were worth across the total U.S. population. By their calculations, the added longevity in the United States was worth \$2.4 trillion a year.

Even more financial gains could be made if the leading causes of death were to be eradicated. Murphy and Topel estimate that eliminating deaths from heart disease would generate an economic value of \$48 trillion, and curing cancer would be worth \$47 trillion. Reducing the death rate from either heart disease

or cancer by 20% would be worth around \$10 trillion to Americans—more than one year’s U.S. gross domestic product.

From an economic standpoint, antiaging research could thus produce a significant return on investment. In 1995, the total U.S. medical research budget was \$36 billion. Compared to the 1,300-fold annual gain resulting from increased longevity, the ROI on medical research more than adequately underscores the tangible benefit to allocations of dedicated funds for antiaging pursuits.

Realize, however, that antiaging research does not register on the map of the total national medical research budget. It is pure serendipity—spinoff of other work in the fields of cell biology, cancer research, and new drug development. Indeed, since its creation in 1974, the U.S. National Institute on Aging has spent more than \$9.4 billion but has yet to turn any medical intervention into a meaningful application to combat the degenerative diseases of aging. Research also needs to become oriented on human clinical research—a departure from the present focus on basic science studies conducted on laboratory animals. Indeed, our lives depend on opening the access to research funding to those with innovative thought and perseverance to see their innovations to fruition.

### **The Sociological Impact Of Longevity**

Due to the upward trend of life expectancy, the net increase in the 65+ population in the United States in 1998 was 145,000—an average of 396 per day. While the world’s population grows at an annual rate of 1.7%, the population over age 65 increases by 2.5% each year. The fastest-growing population in most countries of the world is the 80+ bracket. The World Health Organization Programme on Ageing and Health estimates that, by the year 2025, 30% of the global population will be age 80 or older.

The gerontological explosion will redesign the family structure in this century. The proportion of Americans who are age 60 with at least one parent still alive has risen nearly 45% since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1960, 14% of Americans age 50 still had both parents living; in 2000, that figure swelled to 27%. As a result, more children will get to know their great-grandparents, as the four-generation family becomes more common. There will be more responsibilities assumed by Americans for taking care of their older relatives: In 1997, more than 20–25 million Americans provided or administered care for older family members, and that number is expected to skyrocket in the coming years.

As we age, our medical health becomes inextricably tied to our financial health. Many baby boomers admit that they lack the knowledge and confidence such decisions require. Certainly, as longevity increases, the need for careful planning and extensive discussion increases. Yet, one study found that 44% of married respondents had never discussed with their spouses when they would retire; 40% had never discussed where they will live; and 45% had never talked about how much money they would need.

Likening saving for retirement to “pushing a ball up a hill—the longer you wait, the steeper the hill seems,” the Senate Special Committee on Aging’s former Chairman Chuck Grassley recommends establishing a regular and prolonged savings program, based on the target final total that you anticipate needing to maintain a standard of living to which you’re accustomed. Says Grassley, “My own advice is, don’t over-rely on Social Security.”

The notion of living past 120 is now commonly embraced by even the most conservative of scientists and scientific institutions. In its 2000 report, “In Search of the Secrets of Aging,” the National Institutes of Health recognized that “humans have a maximum life-span of about 120 years.” If antiaging medicine were simply a fad, it would have been relegated to stand along side pet rocks, eight-track tapes, and disco. Quite to the contrary, antiaging medicine has steadily accumulated important accomplishments that validate it as an exacting clinical science.

## **Health Care in the 21st Century**

Beyond servicing those aesthetic and medical needs voiced by the baby boomers, antiaging medicine is likely to emerge as the preeminent mode of health care in the twenty-first century for several reasons:

First, antiaging medicine meets patients' increasing demand for early, routine diagnostics coupled with aggressive, effective intervention, as well as a partnership between physicians/health practitioners and patients and an open marketplace in which potentially life-saving and life-enhancing products with demonstrated efficacy and safety are available.

Second, antiaging medicine is a paradigm that upholds the sanctity of personal freedom of choice. Those who practice or support the specialty revere freedom of thought and hence refrain from limiting, censoring, or discriminating against medical advancements for which independent clinical evidence demonstrates safety and efficacy.

While it is without argument that antiaging medicine has attracted its fair share of controversy and criticism, perhaps the most potent commendation is the fact that every day, in preventive health care settings small and large around the globe, antiaging medicine is speedily being adopted. Indeed, the vast majority of its initial clients were physicians themselves, and this continues to be a strong factor in bringing new doctors into this medical specialty.

The hallmark of antiaging medical care is its emphasis on intervention: finding illness long before it becomes a full-blown disease state, accompanied by rapid, comprehensive treatment and recovery. The focus of antiaging medicine is on finding a cure to the underlying causes of diseases, not simply offering chronic palliative care.

Biotechnological and medical advancements bring the capacity to treat, or ameliorate, degenerative diseases of aging—such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes—heralding the capacity to transform the “twilight years” into the “highlight years.”

More importantly, beyond improving the health of individuals, the investment of time and expense made by those who pursue or support the clinical specialty of antiaging medicine elevates the level of consciousness for our fellow man, as each of us is reminded of the impact of our actions on each other over a protracted period of time. By extending the human life-span and improving its quality, antiaging medicine contributes to creating a gentler, kinder, sustainable, and harmonious global community.

### ***The American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine***

The American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine (A4M) is a nonprofit medical society with a membership of 10,000 physicians, health practitioners, and scientists from 65 countries worldwide. A4M approaches aging as a degenerative metabolic process that leads to chronic degenerative diseases and finally, to death; hence, aging can be controlled and treated.

The A4M membership is composed of thousands of the brightest research minds in medicine, and each of these individuals deserves the opportunity to gain access to government funds to conduct their research, according to A4M president, author Ronald M. Klatz.

A4M strives to enhance “the ability for all men, women, and children alive today to live their lives in the complete absence of debilitating disease and physical and mental disablement.” A4M invites readers to visit The World Health Network at [www.worldhealth.net](http://www.worldhealth.net) to keep abreast of the very latest antiaging news and participate in discussions with others around the world who are interested in life-extending, life-enhancing medical care.

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