

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



“When something exceeds your ability to understand how it works, it sort of becomes magical.”

—Apple promotional video

By the time you read this, I will likely have in my hands the key to the future. It will be as if Miles Monroe (*Sleeper*, 1973) had just emerged from his cryogenic freezing, or Graham from his 203-year-long trance (*The Sleeper Awakes*, H.G. Wells, 1910). I will have purchased the iPad. Yes, Steve Jobs, et al, are about to (supposedly) revolutionize how we are entertained, how we read, how we communicate, how we store our life’s memories, and how we do a myriad of other things we thought we were doing just fine, thank you. With its 10-inch screen, I will be able to buy anything, read entire books, watch movies and TV shows, look at and catalog photographs, surf the net and, most importantly, use the 100,000 applications (or apps, as we Mac users call them and swap with joy) that allow us to do almost anything from plan a wedding (where was this when I needed it?), to compare prices among stores, look up any word in any language, file taxes, make sure a desk is level, find a restaurant and make reservations, play the phone like a harmonica, and on and on $\times 10^6$. If there isn’t an app for it, you probably don’t need to do it! It seems as though we are moving closer to a virtual world.

I recently read an article in *Time* magazine that listed 12 things that have become obsolete in the last decade (*Time*, December 27, 2009), which included calling (I assume as distinguished from texting, e-mailing, twittering, and the like), classified ads in newspapers, dial-up internet, encyclopedias, CDs, landline phones, film and film cameras, yellow pages and address books, catalogs, fax machines, wires, and handwritten letters. I could argue with a number of these: I do a lot of calling and receive many calls, we still need a landline for our home burglar alarm, and the fax still runs, although more and more it is being replaced by scanning/e-mailing, and as for the catalogs, my mail carrier would clearly argue that the number has not decreased (although we buy from them less and less). To that list of things lost I would add grammar, punctuation, and complete sentences. You need to understand my perspective: In medical school, I used a slide rule with a total lack of proficiency and, a few years later, gave the best man at my wedding this brand new invention, the pocket calculator. I still write with a fountain pen filled from a bottle (and my wife has gotten really good at removing ink stains from my shirts) and would use a stick shift if it were available in a 4Runner. On the other hand, more and more news is obtained online (even by me), so that one by one the newspapers are disappearing.

Video stores are already gone, and other shops are on their way to obsolescence. What’s next? I fear it is the book! I don’t know where it started, with the Kindle or the Sony Reader, then the Nook and now the iPad. All you need to do is type in a few words and you can download thousands of books, as well as newspapers and magazines, onto this rather small device. Pages seem to turn, you can bookmark a phrase, and you can seamlessly go from one book to another. In school, you no longer need to lug around a pile of texts, they are already pre-downloaded into your electronic reader. But, somehow it doesn’t seem the same as having something more substantive to hold on to, paper pages to turn, a corner to fold down to mark a memorable phrase. Something that, if dropped, doesn’t shatter!

I also like the feel of *Clinical Advances in Hematology & Oncology* and to read each issue’s splendid papers. In our columns this month, Dr. Tallman provides an update on the treatment of acute promyelocytic leukemia. Dr. Choueiri outlines prognostic factors in patients treated with vascular endothelial growth factor–targeted therapies, and Dr. Seymour considers controversies in the design of phase II clinical trials. In addition, Dr. Garratty discusses drug-induced immune hemolytic anemia, and Dr. Dickler describes updates in HER2-positive disease. In the feature articles, Drs. Tewari and Monk discuss the rationale for the use of non-platinum chemotherapy doublets for metastatic and recurrent cervical carcinoma, and Drs. Neal and Sequist examine first-line use of epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) tyrosine kinase inhibitors in patients with non-small cell lung cancer containing EGFR mutations.

But, I love my Macs, adore my iPhone and, therefore, I will probably buy an iPad just to find out its true potential. I can think of numerous more valuable uses than most apps provide, such as wirelessly writing chemo orders, viewing imaging studies, pulling up journal articles, and virtual wine tasting. On the other hand, I can just imagine sitting on a plane, where I get most of my reading done, and holding this thin LED device on my lap, turning virtual page after virtual page—that is, until the 30 minutes prior to landing, when all electronic devices need to be turned off. At that point, unless I decide to take up knitting, I will pull out and enjoy a real book once again.

Until next month . . .

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD