Foreword

A Long Road

On June 20, 2000, President Bill Clinton delivered a speech describing the potential impact of the sequencing of the human genome: “We are here to celebrate the completion of the first survey of the entire human genome. Without a doubt, this is the most important, most wondrous map ever produced by human kind.” President Clinton went on to say, “In coming years, doctors increasingly will be able to cure diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, diabetes and cancer by attacking their genetic roots.”

Nearly 20 years after that speech, strides have definitely been made toward diagnosing and treating disease based on an individual’s genetic makeup, especially cancer. However, we still have a long way to go. About 1 million people in the United States have Parkinson disease, while over 30 million people have diabetes, and 50 million people are afflicted by Alzheimer disease. The incidence of all of these diseases is increasing, with no imminent cures in sight.

In this issue of Medical Clinics of North America, Dr Howard Levy has assembled a team of experts to discuss where we are and where we are going with respect to genetic medicine. In addition to examining specific “genetic” disorders like neurofibromatosis and Ehlers-Danlos, the authors describe the potential impact of genetic medicine on more common disorders, the incidence of which was described above. Finally, the authors describe the potential impact of pharmacogenomics and whole-exome sequencing, topics of increasing importance to primary care providers, especially given the expansion of direct-to-consumer advertising.

The sequencing of the human genome was a remarkable achievement, one based in science and collaboration. Yet, much more needs to be done. As Chinese
philosopher Lao Tzu said, “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” Sequencing was that first step.

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