

# Want to know the top cancer advances for 2009?

Posted At : November 9, 2009 7:29 AM | Posted By : Melissa Weber

Related Categories: Diagnosis, News, General, Treatment

Each year, the American Society of Clinical Oncology releases a report that pinpoints the top advances in cancer treatment, prevention and screening. This year, ASCO identified 15 key advances in four areas. (The advances were not ranked.)

Here's a breakdown of the findings, provided by ASCO:

## 1. Advances in Personalized Medicine and Targeted Therapies

Multiple trials this year demonstrated that oncology is no longer "one size fits all" medicine. Rather, increased understanding of the biology of cancer is enabling researchers to develop highly targeted drugs and personalized treatment regimens for patients. Advances in this category include:

- The targeted drug trastuzumab (Herceptin), which has been successful against breast tumors that overexpress the HER2 protein, was found to improve survival for HER2+ gastric cancer. [We'll cover this topic in detail in the Winter issue of *CURE*, which drops in December.]
- Researchers identified the first effective immunotherapy for neuroblastoma – chimeric anti-GD2 antibody ch.14.18.
- For the first time in 30 years, a randomized trial identified a regimen – initial chemotherapy combined with the EGFR-targeted drug cetuximab (Erbix) – that increases survival for people with metastatic head and neck cancer.
- Researchers identified a specific subset of patients with non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) who benefit from first-line treatment with the targeted drug gefitinib (Iressa). [Watch for our lung cancer feature in the Spring 2010 issue of *CURE*, which publishes in March.]
- The FDA approved new indications for targeted drugs to treat glioblastoma and advanced kidney cancer, both highly challenging forms of cancer. Bevacizumab (Avastin) was approved as a single agent for treatment of glioblastoma and when combined with interferon, for treatment of advanced kidney cancer. Additionally, everolimus (Afinitor) was approved for kidney cancer in patients whose disease has progressed despite treatment with other targeted drugs. [Read our kidney cancer coverage [here](#).]

## 2. New Standards of Care

Results from several long-awaited clinical trials this year affirmed the superiority of certain treatment regimens for biliary, lung, and prostate cancers. These include:

- The first-ever standard of care for advanced biliary cancer (cancers of the gallbladder and bile ducts) – results from the largest clinical trial to date for this disease stage showed that combination gemcitabine (Gemzar) and cisplatin treatment increases survival and slows cancer progression, compared with gemcitabine treatment alone.
- Data from a late-stage trial reporting that maintenance therapy with pemetrexed (Alimta) extends survival for patients with nonsquamous forms of advanced NSCLC – a finding that establishes a new standard and gives patients a long-term, easily-administered treatment option with low toxicity. [Watch for our lung cancer feature in the Spring 2010 issue of *CURE*, which drops in March.]
- Practice-changing findings showing that radiation following prostatectomy improves survival and reduces risk of metastasis for men with early-stage prostate cancer.

### 3. Cancer Prevention and Screening

This year, findings from large trials shed new light on widely used cancer detection, monitoring and prevention tools. Major research advances in this category include:

- Interim results from two large trials showing that routine PSA testing has a minimal effect on reducing prostate cancer mortality – findings that add new insight to a long-time debate. [Read our coverage [here](#).]
- A large trial showing that treating relapsed ovarian cancer based on rising levels of a protein in the blood called CA125 does not improve outcomes, compared with monitoring for physical symptoms of ovarian cancer relapse. These findings will help spare women from the anxiety and costs of frequent CA125 testing, as well as the toxicity of earlier treatment. [Read our coverage [here](#).]
- Research suggesting that more women may benefit from HPV vaccination than previously thought, based on findings showing that Gardasil reduces the risk of HPV infection, cervical cancer and other HPV-related disease in women aged 25 to 45.

### 4. Large Trials Settle Key Debates in Colon, Breast Cancer Treatment

The results of two closely watched studies settled major debates in the treatment of colon and breast cancers. These include:

- In the first trial to examine bevacizumab in the adjuvant setting, researchers demonstrated that adjuvant bevacizumab treatment does not prevent colon cancer recurrence in patients who have undergone surgery for their disease. [Read our coverage [here](#).]
- Standard three-drug chemotherapy is more effective and less toxic than single-drug treatment with capecitabine (Xeloda) in women age 65 and older undergoing adjuvant treatment for early-stage breast cancer. Researchers had thought that single-drug treatment may be more tolerable for older women, but this was not found to be the case.

The full report--plus reports from previous years--is available at [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net).

