A dose of curiosity

A look at the trends we're watching

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Edition 1 | 2026

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10 rising health topics

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PCOS gets a new name

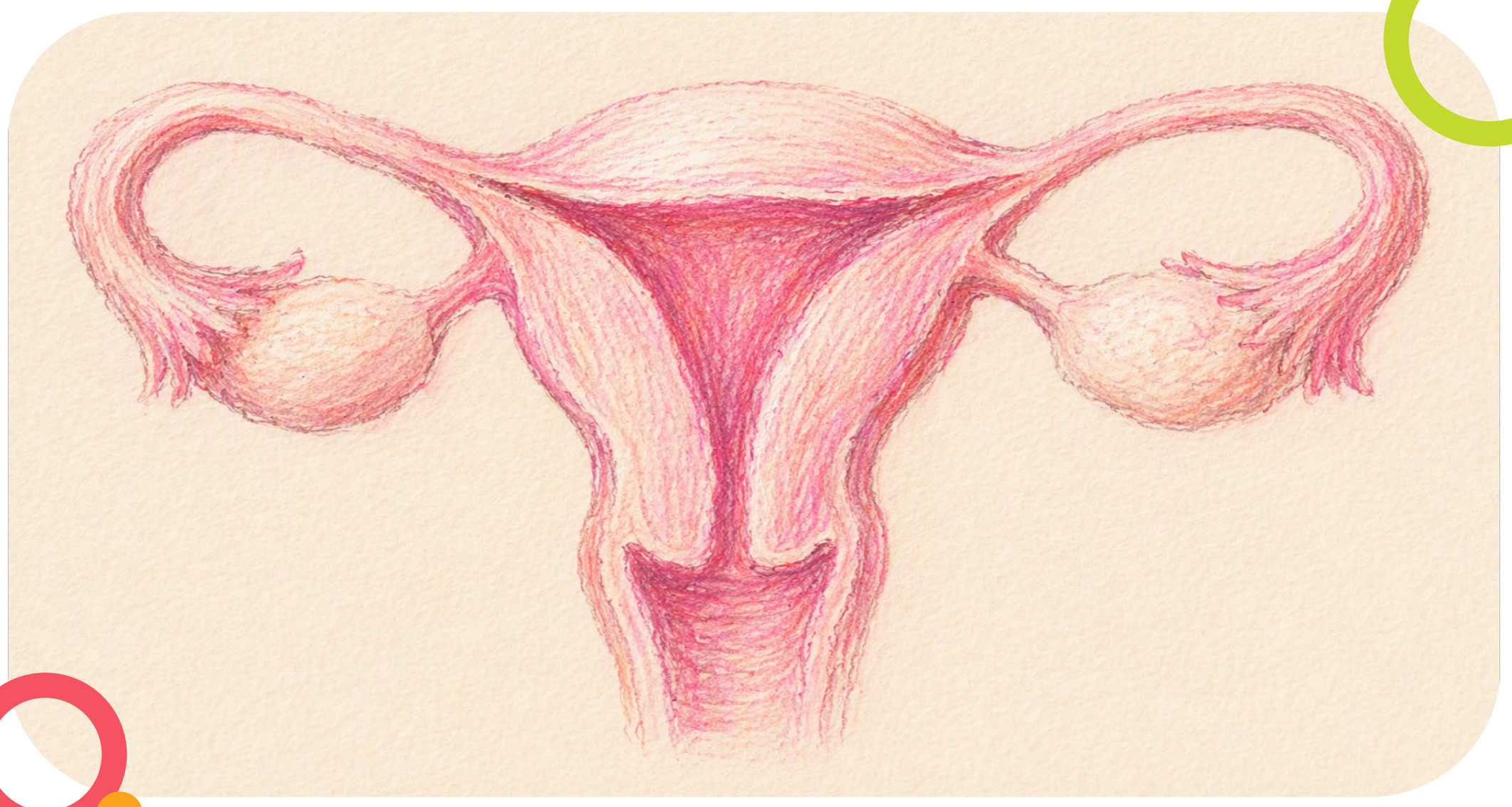
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is **officially being renamed to polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS)**.

The change reflects more than semantics; **it signals a broader shift in women's health**.

PMOS recognizes the condition as systemic, not solely reproductive, aligning with growing awareness of how hormonal disorders intersect with metabolic disease, mental health, and long-term outcomes.

This **reframing addresses long-standing diagnosis gaps**, where women have been misdiagnosed or dismissed.

When the definition of a disease expands, so does the opportunity to redefine how and when brands engage.



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1 Rising health **topics**

Over 2 in 10 consumers self-diagnose online

The behavior skews younger, with about half of Gen Z and millennials (51% each) and 45% of Gen X reporting doing so, versus just 29% of boomers.

Search engines are the most influential channel, with 38% calling them the most useful for identifying a condition.

Self-diagnosis doesn’t always lead to an appointment: only 31% always consult a doctor to confirm their findings.

Consumers' willingness to rely on their own research suggests that early perceptions of a condition are increasingly shaped before clinical conversations take place.

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America's health and wellness influencers

Half of U.S. adults under 50 say they get health and wellness information from social media influencers or podcasts.

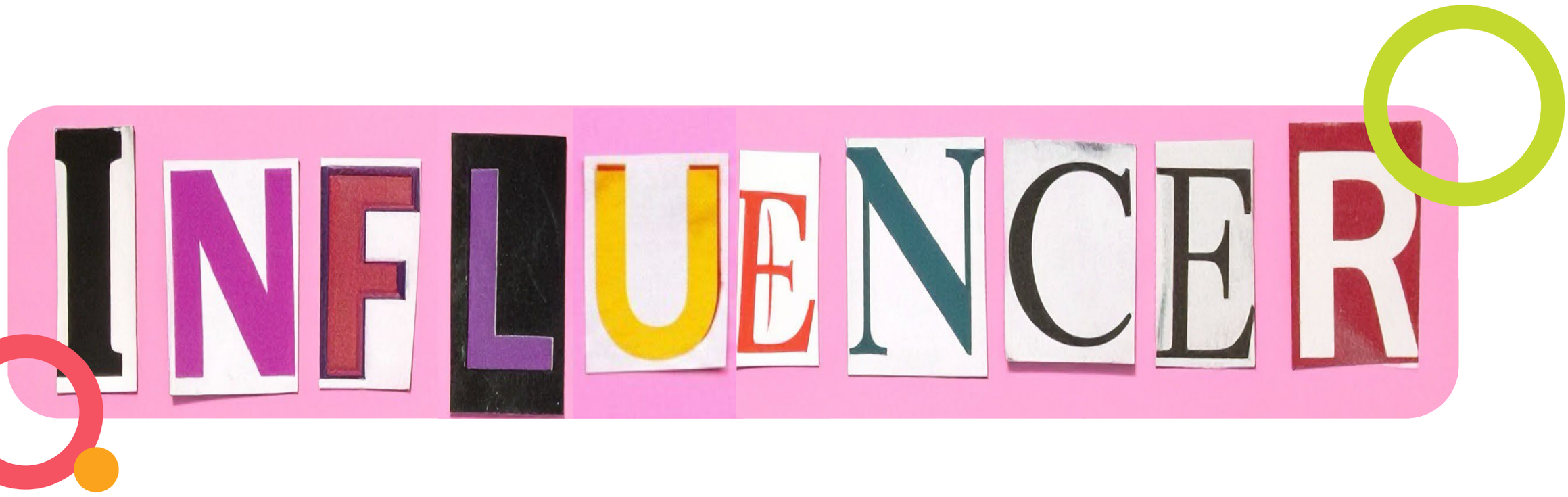
These influencers represent a mix of backgrounds:

- **41% describe themselves as a healthcare professional** (e.g., doctor, pharmacist, nutritionist, etc.)
- Others identify as coaches, entrepreneurs, or someone with relevant life experience

Gender dynamics are shifting:

- **64% of health & wellness influencers are women**, a big change from 2024, where 63% were men
- Women are more likely to cite their life experiences, such as parenthood

As influencers become core health information sources, brands must move from one-off partnerships to intentional influencer strategies grounded in credibility, education, and sustained engagement.



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2 top trends and behaviors

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The AI alternative brands are adopting

For some, it's about **AI-generated content not aligning with a brand's DNA** (as seen with Aerie's 100% Real Campaign). For others, it **reflects growing consumer skepticism**: about half of consumers say they prefer purchasing from brands that don't use generative AI in marketing.

Meta Commentary:

- Creators are calling out the blurred line between real and AI in modern marketing, using self-aware storytelling to question what audiences are actually seeing

Showing Your Work:

- Brands like Apple and A24 are pulling back the curtain with behind-the-scenes content, highlighting practical effects and real production to reinforce credibility

The Digital Antidote:

- Polaroid and Heineken are leaning into tangible, real-world experiences, positioning "realness" as a counter to AI saturation, sometimes with a satirical edge in Heineken's case

As AI increases skepticism, pharma brands should prioritize visible authenticity to build trust and credibility, while AI works behind-the-scenes to enhance execution.

Learn more

Emerging trend: real world > feeds

Driven by no-phone school policies and companies like Yondr encouraging phone-free experiences, **Gen Z and Gen Alpha are leaning into a digital detox moment: prioritizing presence over posting. Nearly half of Gen Z report actively trying to reduce screen time.**

As younger consumers rediscover the value of distraction-free environments, brands are starting to notice and taking action.

- **Pinterest** created a phone-free Coachella activation with analog experiences, reinforcing that “the best things online are a reason to go offline”

- **L.L. Bean** launched an Off the Grid tote for May’s Mental Health Month

As younger audiences seek real-world experiences, brands should consider amplifying live, in-person experiences and designing for intentional, meaningful touchpoints.

Learn more

2 Top **trends** and **behaviors**

Private sharing is the new reach

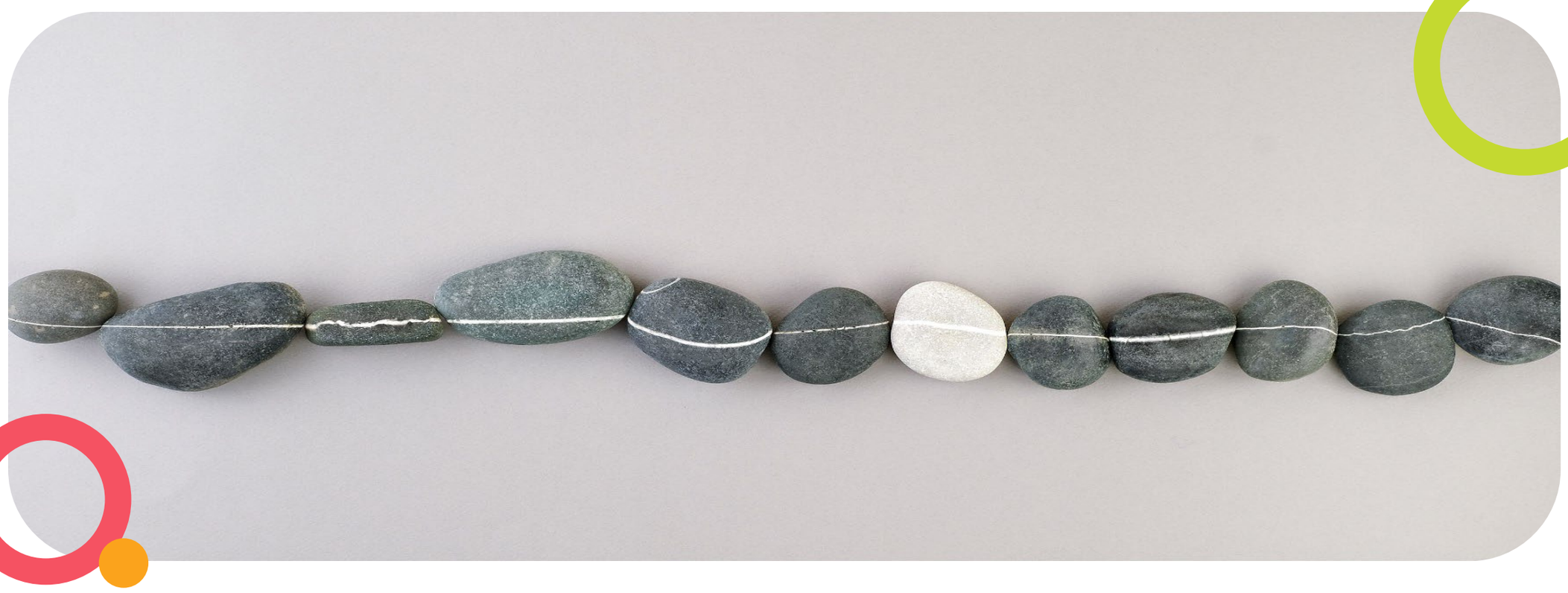
Major life moments are stronger predictors of buying behavior than age.

At the same time, behaviors and attitudes across social platforms are converging, making context and relevance more powerful than demographics.

One key behavior is **Digital Pebbling—the act of sharing content with close friends via DMs** as a way of saying, "*I saw this and thought of you*." This behavior is widespread, with 90% of people across generations participating.

This signals an important shift: **the most valuable content is shared in private**.

For brands, this highlights the importance of creating content with pass-along value—content that feels personal, relatable, and rooted in real-life moments that people want to share with others.



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3 top platform trends

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3 Top platform **trends**

Meet Shapes: Where AI joins the group chat

Shapes is **a new social app that brings AI characters into group chats alongside humans**, turning conversations into a shared human-AI experience (think Discord, but with AI participants). AI agents, “Shapes,” act like normal chat members; they can message, respond, and even initiate conversations.

Shapes is positioned as an antidote to isolating AI companion apps or silent group chats and is **an early signal that community-based AI integration could be the next consumer battleground, not just feeds and ads.**

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3 Top platform **trends**

Meta expands Reels trending ad offering

Reels trending ads allow advertisers to place ads alongside popular, trending Reels content, positioning brand messages next to videos that are already driving high engagement.

Now, they are expanding with **event-aligned content lineups to allow brands to tie into high-traffic cultural moments** like NFL games and Formula 1.

The expansion also includes new trending content categories like TV & Movies and Travel.

This could provide brands greater access to "cultural context" and new options for Upper-Funnel or Reminder Advertising.

According to Meta, Reels trending ads will now be available to all interested advertisers with a Meta sales rep.

Consider using Reels to reach new audiences, Carousels for save-worthy content, and Stories for direct audience connection.

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4 Spotlight

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4 Spotlight

Sid & Rosie: A punk rock love story about cancer

This is a strategic culture POV from Biolumina that uses two parallel case studies to explore an emerging cultural crisis in precision medicine.

The Core Stories

Two individuals facing terminal cancer diagnoses chose radical action:

Sid Sijbrandij (GitLab co-founder): Quit his job when standard osteosarcoma treatment failed, used AI to decode his own tumor biology, and designed a personalized multi-modal treatment combining radioligand therapy, immunotherapy, and mRNA vaccine strategies.

Paul Conyngham (Australian tech entrepreneur): When his dog **Rosie** was diagnosed with aggressive mast cell cancer, he designed and administered a personalized mRNA vaccine after 18 months of work, navigating regulatory and infrastructure barriers alone.

The Key Insight: AI as Time Compression

The breakthrough wasn't curing cancer—it was that AI collapsed years of specialist training into weeks.

The Real Bottleneck: Human Systems, Not Science

Here's the uncomfortable truth: **both cases hit a wall where bureaucracy, not biology, became the limiting factor.**

- IRBs moved slower than FDA emergency pathways
- Hospital infrastructure was built for population averages, not n=1 medicine
- Patent law blocked identified compounds
- Regulatory documentation required 120+ hours of specialist interpretation

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4 Spotlight

Sid & Rosie: A punk rock love story about cancer

The Cultural Crisis: Inflamed Hope Meets Unreachable Solutions

As sequencing costs drop, AI tools democratize, and computational capability spreads, **billions of people will have the ability to decode their own biology** and demand personalized treatment. But the system cannot scale to meet this demand.

The inequality gap becomes emotional, not just logistical:

- Technology makes what's possible visible
- Bureaucracy makes what's accessible unreachable
- This creates grief, rage, and a trust crisis
- The patient who has researched their tumor more than their physician has time for—this becomes the norm, not the exception

The Implication for Health Communications

This isn't a scientific or policy problem to solve from a distance—it's a **cultural brief**:

Name the myth:
Knowledgeable patients aren't adversarial—they're legitimate.

Honor the intelligence:
Patients are sophisticated; communications must evolve.

Address the emotional impact:
Technology raises expectations; systems disappoint.

Acknowledge systemic silence:
Who's missing? Those without access or resources.

The Bottom Line:
"The future is here. It's just not evenly distributed." The distance between those who can access cutting-edge personalized medicine and those who can only see it is becoming the defining cultural wound of precision medicine—and that's where health communicators need to focus.

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5 micro dose

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Quick hits worth reading

8 Emerging Trends Defining Consumer Behavior in 2026

Consumers in 2026 are navigating a world of contradictions—embracing tech while craving human connection, and redefining identity on their own terms.

Digital Fatigue is Forcing Brands to Rethink Engagement

Digital isn’t being abandoned, but consumers are becoming more intentional, overwhelmed, and selective in how they engage.

The Curious Mystery of Disappearing Teaspoons

The study highlights human behavior around ownership, accountability, and the hidden costs of “minor” items going missing.

A Practical Guide to Social Search & AEO

Winning today means optimizing for both social search and AI answers, not just rankings.

Pfizer Taps NFL Prospect to Bring Health Mainstream

By partnering with top draft pick Fernando Mendoza, Pfizer ties cancer awareness to a major cultural moment to reach broader, younger audiences.