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Severe stress, junk food
may do you no harm at all

Is severe stress bad for you? Does eating lots of junk food harm your health?

There's no evidence for either belief, Norman White of the health sciences faculty at McMaster University told those attending a seminar last week at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Those were two of the more controversial views of Dr. White who, with Trevor Hancock, associate medical officer of health in Toronto, looked at the future of health care in Ontario.

Dr. White said Ontario is at the beginning of a major revolution in health care that will make the system almost unrecognizable by the year 2000.

Dr. Hancock said there are four possible futures: collapse, decline and chaos; a high tech life; a simple, conservator society; or a totalitarian state staving off chaos and collapse.

"We must be adaptable as we consider the future since we don't really know what the world will be like in 10 years."

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Discussing stress, often seen as a killer, Dr. White said there is no demonstrated connection showing that stress is harmful. "Hundreds of people came through the Holocaust healthy, despite unparalleled stress."

The same is true of junk foods, he said. Those who eat them are not less healthy than those who watch their diets more carefully.

Another puzzle for doctors is that coronary heart disease, long on the increase in North America, is suddenly declining rapidly. No one knows why, but the reason has little connection with anything doctors are doing.

Dr. Hancock said most people, when they think of health care, think of doctors and hospitals, all a part of what he called "the sick-care system." He said that people must learn the art of being well, which may have little connection with either doctors or hospitals.

Dr. White agreed, saying that as many as 30 per cent of all hospital admissions may be caused by errors in treatment, and that both over-treatment and over-investigation in hospitals make people sick.