

# Primary care key to sustaining system

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As Health Minister George Abbott opened up the Conversation on Health in Kelowna last weekend he said, "you have the opportunity to be health minister for the day — welcome to my nightmare."

Although his statements were made in jest, it's clear that health care in this province is becoming the hot topic of the day and in the Okanagan last week various events — from the Conversation on Health, to the Okanagan Health Forum — addressing the issue packed auditoriums.

Everything from ER backlogs, to rising cost have dominated the discussions within these meetings, but primary care was consistently hailed as the province's, and the country's, best plan to avert disaster.

And the reason for personal responsibility for one's health has become clear.

According to this month's throne speech, unless something is done, and soon, demands on public health care will reach a breaking point — not in the distant future, but in a matter of years.

Highlighting that increased needs for new services, technologies, drugs, and treatments are outpacing revenues coming in, Lieutenant Governor Iona Campagnolo's speech painted a less than rosy picture for those who will need to rely on the system in years to come.

"Overall health spending will have grown by 51.8 per cent since the year 2000 — at about four times the rate of inflation in that period," she said.

"Next year's increase in health funding will be 7.3 per cent — twice the rate of economic growth and over three times the current rate of inflation."

She said the government will continue to listen and learn from British Columbians, to innovate and to explore new ways of delivering

better health services and highlighted the idea of sustainability.

"The most effective health promotion strategy we have discovered to date is education and individual action," she said.

And when Abbott addressed the crowd at Kelowna's Conversation on Health, he echoed her sentiments.

Abbott said the province was on the precipice of a wave of health care demands of epic proportions as a 25 per cent of the province will soon be 65 years and older, noting that it will have profound implications for sustainability.

"We have to think about how we manage health care," he said.

Noting that chronic diseases are growing in a staggering way — with diabetes rates expected to double in the next decade and the B.C. Cancer Agency predicting a 20 per cent rise in incidents in the next five to seven years — Abbott said he's "got religion" on preventative care.

"Child obesity is something we need to be concerned about and we need to identify vulnerable British Columbians, and give them the best education and keep them out of the acute care stream."

Two days after Abbott's appearance at the Conversation on Health, was the Okanagan Health Forum.

Dr. Joel Fuhrman, a board-certified family physician and acclaimed author of *Eat to Live* opened up his presentation with a question.

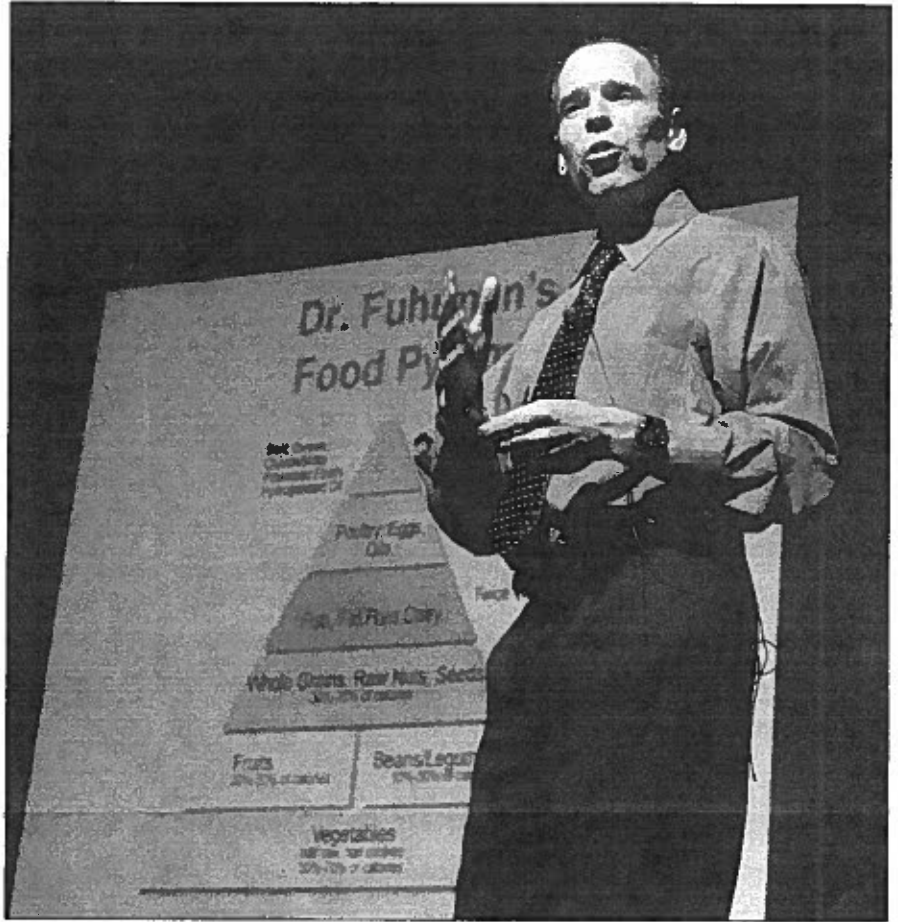
"Raise your hand if you'd like to have a heart attack," he said.

When the audience at the Cleland Theatre awkwardly laughed, he said that the question was no joking matter, because someone is dropping dead of a heart attack every 20 seconds.

We know what is causing these illnesses, and obesity and general disregard for one's own health are high on the list, Fuhrman added.

"Right now we have an unprecedented opportunity to live longer than ever before," he said.

An opportunity that he said is being wasted as many live into their



Photos by Kathy Michaels

Dr. Joel Fuhrman speaks to a packed house at the Cleland Theatre Feb. 20 during the Okanagan Health Forum. Jennifer Anutooshkin (front page) an ER nurse Penticton Regional Hospital, has a front line view of the issues facing the health care system.

latter years caring for diseases, suffering from dementia and struggling to keep healthy due to improper nutrition throughout their lives.

"Fifty-one percent of (North) Americans die of heart attacks, and 30 per cent die of cancer.

"We have a religion of medicalogy," he said. "We think the answer to everything is a drug, we go to the doctor and he fixes you."

"We have the worst long life expectancy in the world," he said, adding "what's the point of living so long if it's hell?"

However, Fuhrman said there is an answer and it's as simple as changing the way one eats.

Discussing nutrient density, he introduced the formula of Health = Nutrients / Calories.

A North American diet that consists of excessive consumption of calorie-rich wheat-based foods, and is light on foods high in phytonutrients is what's slowly wiping out this continent.

Fuhrman attributed the decline to an "overfed but undernourished" population, noting that it's tanking health care with increased incidences of diabetes, heart disease, cancer and high blood pressure.

To avert living into one's later year's caring for long-term illnesses, Fuhrman advised that one should base their diets on fresh vegetables,

fruits and legumes, while minimizing animal products, processed grains and high-carbohydrate foods.

The reasoning is that whole plant foods are high enough in fiber and bulk that people will get full long before they are able to consume too many calories from these foods.

"You have a unique opportunity in this portion of the world to have an island of good health," he said, noting the opportunity to eat well was ample in such an agriculturally rich area.

But, to get there as North Americans we have to learn to eat not emotionally, or because of habit, but rather because of necessity.

Fuhrman said that feelings of sickness caused by skipping a meal, such as light-headedness, stomach cramping, and headache, are not symptoms of hunger.

He refers to these symptoms as "toxic hunger" and said the feelings eventually go away after a person adjusts to eating a low-calorie, high-phytonutrient diet.

"It's like an addict," he said. "You take away their heroine and they get sick, you take away a smoker's cigarettes, and they feel sick — but that's just detoxification."

While Fuhrman gave ways to get one's health on track, Dr. David Jenkins, founder of the Glycemic Index, and the Portfolio Diet, spoke

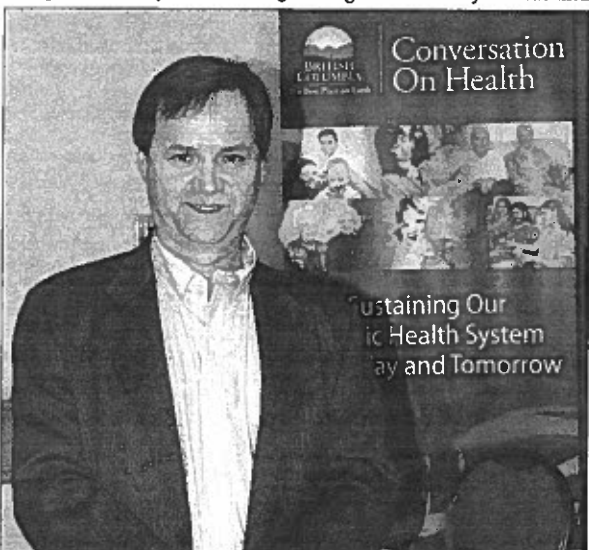
next and explained where humanity has gone awry.

Jenkins, who is one of the world's leading experts on the topic of nutrition and chronic disease, is the Canadian research chair in metabolism and nutrition at the University of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital, said people have strayed far from the diets they were designed to have and it's created the health crisis.

"What is happening in health care today is a matter of getting what people have asked for."

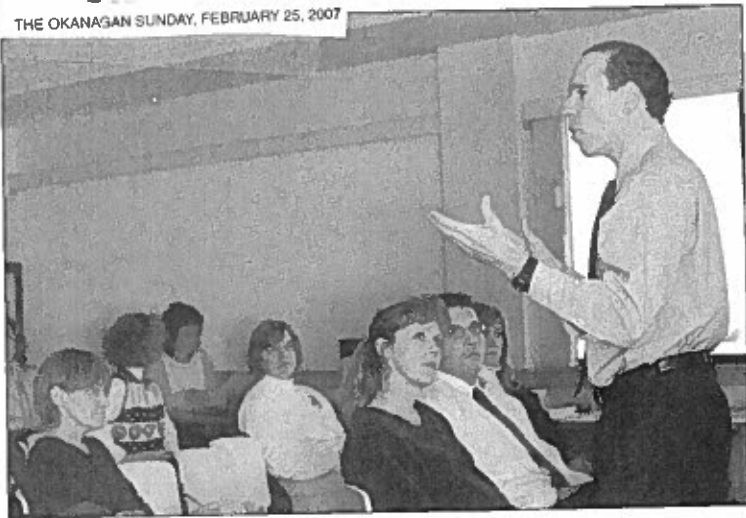
"The pharmaceutical industry has done what we wanted it to," he said, referring to advancements in various medications.

"We can sit on a couch with a six pack and watch others exercise, that's the mark of our society, but we have to be careful of what we ask for."



Health Minister George Abbott opens up Saturday's Conversation on Health in Kelowna.

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**Dr. Joel Fuhrman, author of the popular nutrition book, *Eat to Live*, addressed 400 people in Kelowna, 450 in Penticton and several hundred health professionals in both cities last week.**

KEVIN TROWBRIDGE/Special to The Okanagan Sunday

# Author explains how to disease-proof the body

**Health-care professionals in Kelowna and Penticton hear nutritionist speak on the importance of right diet**

By J.P. SQUIRE  
The Okanagan Sunday

Many North Americans believe an excellent health-care system will result in a long, healthy life.

Dr. Joel Fuhrman, author of the popular nutrition book *Eat to Live*, counters that many North Americans are suffering in their later years as a result of that fallacy.

"In the modern world, in America, in the United States, we think the new religion is medicology: we expect that doctors will protect us, that drugs and surgeries are the solution for a long and healthy life," he told more than 800 people at public forums and several hundred health-care professionals at workshops in Kelowna and Penticton this week.

The United States is 22nd in healthy life expectancy, the worst of all industrialized countries, he pointed out.

"The more money spent on medical care, the worse it gets, not the better it gets. Putting more money into doctors, drugs and procedures does not give you a healthy life expectancy. That's why we have to have a new way of thinking," he said.

What is the point of having a longer life if you're spending the last 20 years unable to be physically active, without your mental faculties intact, in a nursing home, sick or suffering from all kinds of medical conditions, he asked.

"The message is: nobody has to have a heart attack; you don't have to get a stroke; you don't have to get the meds in your later years," he said.

"My message is that nutritional excellence is our most powerful therapeutic or medical intervention, more powerful than any drug or surgeries. When you know how to take care of yourself in your own

home with good nutrition, you don't have to worry about the diseases which kill most Americans."

The Okanagan Valley could become an example to the rest of the world of a population with a long lifespan based on exercise, fresh air and a high-nutrient diet.

During his lectures, he explained which foods have the most micro-nutrients and how much of those to eat to disease-proof the human body.

"One of the secrets to a long life is the quantity of green vegetables in the diet," he said. He also explained the effect on the brain from berries, cherries, plums and how certain fruits have significant amounts of protective nutrients.

The typical American diet consists of 40 per cent calories and animal products, 51 per cent processed food, and only seven per cent fruits and vegetables.

"You can't possibly get enough micro-nutrients from that. You can't escape getting heart attacks, strokes or cancer. We have to do something different; we have to change those percentages, get the level of high-nutrient vegetation up higher," he said.

Fuhrman was joined by Dr. David Jenkins, a nutrition researcher and University of Toronto professor who has authored hundreds of scientific papers. He developed the glycemic index which shows how food affects blood sugar levels.

About 400 people attended a public health forum in Kelowna; 450 at a similar event in Penticton.

Fuhrman and Jenkins addressed 80 doctors, nurses, pharmacists, nutritionists, dieticians and other health professionals in Kelowna, 70 in Penticton, and they held several workshops with physicians in both cities.

"I saw a tremendous response from doctors in the audience; they were really enthused," said Fuhrman.

"I'm really excited about seeing so many physicians and the local population so interested in nutritional excellence. It was really a great boost to me. I felt really good about being here because it gave me such great feedback."