Do you remember the sheep "Dolly"? She was the first cloned mammal (a frog was done years ago).

The researchers at Edinburgh University that cloned her noted she had shortened "telemeres". Telemeres are little caps at the end of chromosomes and when shortened, lead to the death of cells.

Dolly developed arthritis prematurely. Stress has been blamed for many things, but the evidence is not always easy to confirm presumed linkages.

A team at the University of California, San Francisco, led by Dr. Elissa S. Epel reports that they studied a group of 39 mothers caring for children with chronic illness, and matched them with 19 mothers whose children were normal.

Stress was assessed using questionnaires, and the researchers tried to correlate the level of stress or the duration of stress with the length of telemeres.

They found not all caregivers were as stress as others, and that stress management appears to work in relieving stress.

An important finding was that telemeres were shorter in the group of 14 assessed as having the highest stress scores, and longest in the 14 having the lowest stress scores.

Telemeres measured an average length of 3,110 units in the most-stressed group, and 3,660 units in the least-stressed group - a difference of 550 units.

In adults, telemeres shorten with age - in fact, and average shortening is 31-63 units each year. If this stress-related shortening of the telemeres correlates with aging, and shortening of 550 units would correspond to 9-17 years.

Studies are yet to be done on stress and longevity in such a way as to tie all this together, but such a study surely is food for thought.

Perhaps faith, hope, trust, and love are all health ingredients. As we let the mind of Christ be in us, we should be less stressed.

It would be interesting to compare telemere length in groups that claim religious experience.