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Many causes of violence can be prevented: Nosal

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Before a fist first strikes another's flesh in anger, violence prevention can do its work.

That's the message Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal imparted to the Region's health and social services committee last Tuesday.

In an information-only presentation, Dr. Nosal stressed that violence has many causes, and with them just as many spots for intervention.

"Violence is not an inevitable consequence of modern society," he said. "It's a learned human behaviour."

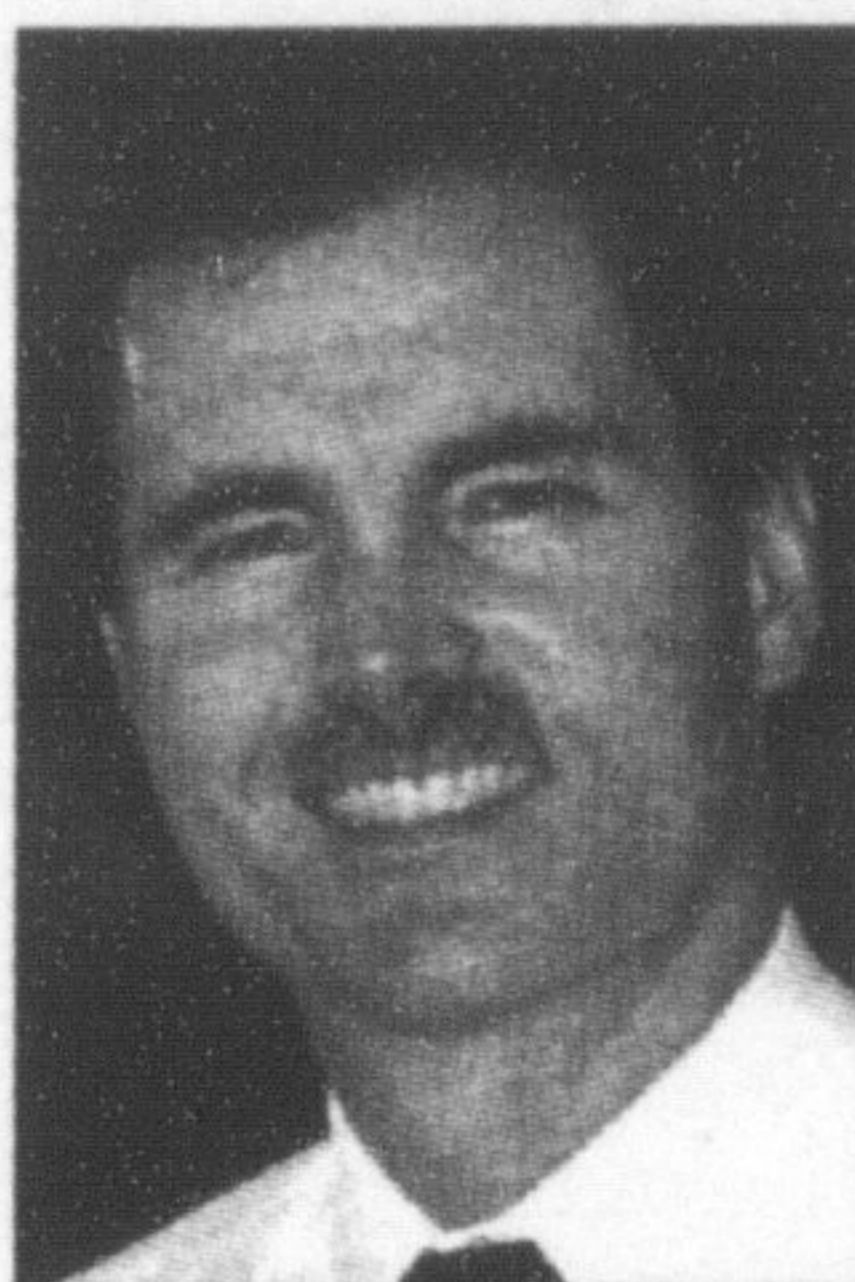
Risk factors include excessive family conflict, a lack of consistency in both the giving of love and the doling out of discipline and punishment, a lack of supervision and the poor mental health of a parent.

Kids can also learn violence through music, movies and video games.

Early symptoms that hint at a blossoming of violent behaviours occur as early as grade 7 in students. They include poor grades, weak bonds in school, a poor school environment, such as a prevalence of drug use, and low

self-esteem in girls.

But the latter symptom doesn't hold true with many boys, warned Dr. Nosal.



Dr. Bob Nosal

"Sometimes it's the guys with the high self-esteem who are involved but with girls, it's the low self-esteem," he said.

And schools with a zero-tolerance policy on violent behaviour do have an impact on curbing aggressive behaviour, he added.

But they can't do it alone. "The police on their own won't be able to deal with it," said Dr. Nosal.

"The health department won't. Stand along programs won't be effective."

Inconsistent attempts to educate students or the public also aren't enough.

"Information alone isn't going to do the trick," said Dr. Nosal. "It has to be integrated into what the schools are doing. A lot of times it's a one-off thing, instead of having it of sufficient intensity."

That means coping mechanisms

in the forms of conflict resolution and anger management have to be consistently taught in order to have the desired effect.

The trick is not to view violence as a black and white behaviour, but rather as something along a continuum, said Dr. Nosal.

When viewed in that light, many places to step in are revealed.

"There are risk factors along the continuum and we can basically target a number of areas," said Dr. Nosal.

"There are multiple points of intervention."

Part of the challenge is to integrate the work various coalitions are already doing, such as the Halton Violence Prevention Committee and the Halton Elder Abuse Prevention Committee.

Currently, violence prevention is not a mandatory program at the health department. But if it were to become one, it could be cost-shared on a 50-50 basis with the Province.

That's an option Halton is looking at, said Dr. Nosal.

Oakville Councillor Keith Bird, who also sits on the Halton Regional Police Services Board, said violence prevention is also on the police agenda.

Additional resources have been allocated to it in the upcoming police budget, which has yet to come before council, he said.

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