

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Balance needed to fix health-care woes

The concern of some York Region medical experts about Canada's spiralling rate of antibiotic resistance highlights underlying problems with our health-care system.

Data shows penicillin-resistant streptococcus pneumoniae hit 21 per cent last year despite the fact it dropped in 1999 following a national awareness campaign.

Grace Volkening, Southlake Regional Health Centre's co-ordinator of infection control, points the finger not only at physicians, who may again be prescribing antibiotics as if they were "candy", but at patients pressuring doctors for prescriptions.

Certainly, unnecessary use of antibiotics is a concern. But also of pressing concern are the flaws in a system allowing some patients seemingly unlimited access to prescription drugs. The "doctor shopping" sees them racking up costs without accountability.

While allowing patients great choice over when and where they are treated is one of the tenets of medicare, it's time to make some trade-offs — if the system is to continue at all. It's ironic the system can be abused by some patients and physicians prescribing unnecessary drugs, while, on the other hand, some people requiring drugs can't afford them.

Some advocates for reform are suggesting a national drug-buying agency should be established to secure medications at reduced rates through bulk purchases.

A national drug plan could cover drug costs that reach "catastrophic" levels for individual patients, some say. Others support a national drug protocol to determine which drugs should be listed for coverage, while some say users should pick up more of the costs.

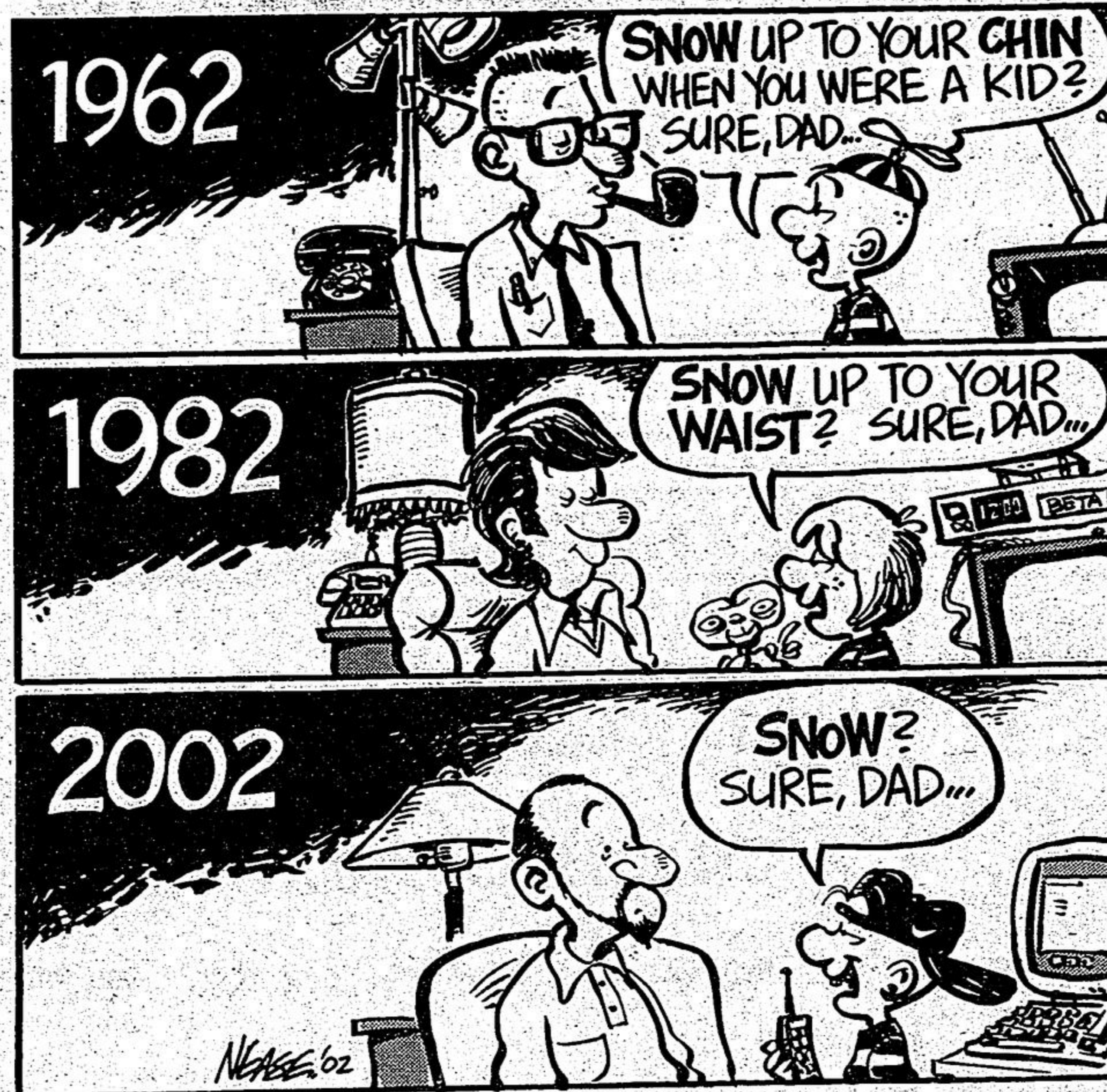
Alberta is taking a different tack, considering a medical savings account that will, effectively, reward people who stay healthy and manage their health care with accountability.

It may very well be possible to control costs through administrative changes, if we follow the example of British Columbia, which tracks the uses and abuses of prescription drugs by individual patients — that would solve the concerns about antibiotic resistance rates.

Again, it's about finding balance and making trade-offs, given the pressing need to bring some economic efficiency to the system.

Canadians must decide which reform options best reflect their values.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Home more important than school in how boys, girls learn

Re: Boys might lag behind girls because most teachers are female, letter to the editor, Jan. 26

Jeff Harmsen's assessment of the factors affecting the school achievement of boys is both sexist and simplistic.

His contention boys lag behind girls in grading because "the vast majority of teachers are female" denigrates both the commitment and craft of women teachers (although he might well ask what social factors lead so few men to teach, especially in elementary schools).

Furthermore, in assessing the impact of modeling, the research establishes that the environment of the home is more significant than that of the classroom.

If more fathers would read to and with their children, demonstrate that activities of literacy and numeracy are interesting, get involved in the early learning activities of their children (rather than waiting until the kids pick up on dad's interests) and would attend school meetings (instead of leaving that responsibility to mom), boys would be influenced by powerful models for academic success.

The issue is, of course, much more complex. Trained teachers attend to a myriad of learning style differences, including wide ranges of intellectual and emotional development, in the process of modifying the curriculum.

While an analysis of the influence of gen-

der differences can provide valuable insight into the process of schooling, it is only one part of a very large puzzle.

MARK JEFFERIES
MARKHAM

Learning character attributes will make York Region better place

Re: We need you to help build our character community, a column by Brenda Larson, Jan. 26

I would like to compliment both Markham Mayor Don Cousens and editor-in-chief Brenda Larson for spearheading this tremendous initiative in our communities of York Region.

We at the York Region District School Board are in the process of implementing character education into our curriculum. I believe the partnership between our schools and communities in this arena will pay huge dividends.

I believe I can speak for the entire school board in saying we will work hard to ensure each child learns about respect, responsibility, courage, integrity, perseverance and all the other attributes of a good character.

York Region is a leader, thanks to leaders with character such as Don Cousens.

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Dave Teetzel

Tory must butt out double standard on addictions

Let's start by saying smoking is bad for you. If you don't smoke, you shouldn't start. If you do smoke, you should quit.

And if someone you know smokes, have a little compassion, will you?

The anti-smoking fervour in society has become so extreme it's hypocritical.

Case in point: the policy proposals unveiled by Health Minister Tony Clement as he campaigns for the Ontario Tory leadership.

Let's say a crack addict holds up a convenience store. Mr. Clement is proposing the accused be placed in a supervised treatment program as soon as he is charged, as an alternative to trial.

Gaming funds would be used to fund treatment for drug addictions.

Mr. Clement would also like to raise more money for health care. He proposes to do this by jacking up the price of cigarettes by \$5 a carton, deeming this a user-pay principle.

This did not impress Roger Varley, the reporter I assigned to interview Mr. Clement during his recent visit to York Region. Mr. Varley, a longtime smoker, suggested this was downright punitive.

It strikes me as a double standard. If you are addicted to illegal drugs and commit crimes to support your habit, you receive free treatment.

If you are addicted to gambling, the government happily supports your habit to fund treatment for illegal drug users.

But if your poison is a legal but highly addictive drug, tobacco, the solution to the problem is to hit you in the pocketbook — yet again.

The assumption being smokers will use the health-care system more than pink-lunged folk, so they should pay more for health care.

Following that logic, he might also add a surcharge for alcohol, junk food, cable TV, cars and any other product that could be shown to detract from a healthy lifestyle.

I feel sorry for the guy who started smoking as a teenager, just to be cool. As he grew older, he heard the health warnings and knew he should quit but didn't and, over time, became deeply addicted.

Then, one day, he couldn't smoke in his office, then in his favourite restaurant, then at the bingo hall.

He was a pariah of society. Mr. Clement wants to enhance smoking prevention and cessation programs. Hopefully, he'll make them available free and use provincial resources to monitor the anti-smokers' progress.

Of course, if our smoker were to rob a liquor store and tell the arresting officer he needs the money to support his increasingly expensive cigarette habit, I guess Mr. Clement would then offer him a full medically supervised stop-smoking program free, gratis, in lieu of jail time.

LETTERS POLICY

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