

Eating disorder clinic national model

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

"It is never too late to be what you might have been."

The adage, written on a ceiling tile by an anonymous teenage patient at Southlake Regional Health Centre's regional eating disorder program, is as poignant as it is hopeful.

It could also be the motto for the nationally renowned program.

In 1997, the Ministry of Health designated Southlake as the inaugural site of a regional program serving teenagers in Ontario's central east area, including the regions of York and Durham, Simcoe and Haliburton

counties.

The program has helped more than 500 patients since it opened. Its multidisciplinary approach to care is a model for other day treatment programs, including those at Toronto's Sick Children's, North York General and London Children's hospitals.

"Southlake was the first hospital in Ontario and one of the first in Canada to have a day treatment program specifically designed for adolescents with eating disorders," team leader John Schmelefske said. "Before the program, clients in the community would continue to lose weight until they

required admission to the hospital. Day treatment is a less intrusive and more cost-effective way to prevent weight loss."

The 14-member program team, helping 50 patients at a time, is comprised of professionals from psychiatry, social work, nutrition, psychology, child and youth work and education.

Their goal is to help teenagers resume normal eating, restore their weight, eliminate dangerous weight loss practices and resolve underlying psychological issues.

All meals and snacks are eaten during the weekday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. program hours

and generally, patients participate for three to six months.

Board qualified teachers help participants continue their school studies while in the program.

The program treats anorexia nervosa and bulimia, two of the main manifestations of eating disorders.

Anorexia nervosa results when an individual refuses to maintain a body weight at or above minimum for age and height because of an intense fear of becoming fat.

Bulimia involves a pattern of binge eating followed by either self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives or excessive exercise to lose weight.

EATING DISORDER FACTS

The regional eating disorder program at Southlake Regional Health Centre treats anorexia nervosa and bulimia, two conditions in which patients go to extremes to lose weight. Binge eating disorder is not treated at the program. Patients must be referred to the program by a family physician or pediatrician.

In Canada:

- Approximately 1 per cent of the population has an eating disorder;

- Among those with eating disorders, one in 10 are males and one in four are females aged 12 to 18;

- 60 per cent of grade 7 and 8 girls are dieting to lose weight;

- By Grade 6, 25 per cent of girls and 10 per cent of boys have been on a diet;

- Since 1987, hospitalizations for eating disorders have increased by 34 per cent among young women up to age 15 and by 29 per cent among 15 to 24 year olds.

"Eating disorders are multi-determined," said Mr. Schmelefske, a registered social worker at Southlake since 1980.

"We live in a world focused on body image and weight loss. Life is stressful for teenagers. There's a lot of peer pressure and there are personality factors that can make people susceptible to eating disorders. Sometimes they're sensitive, perfectionists or obsessive.

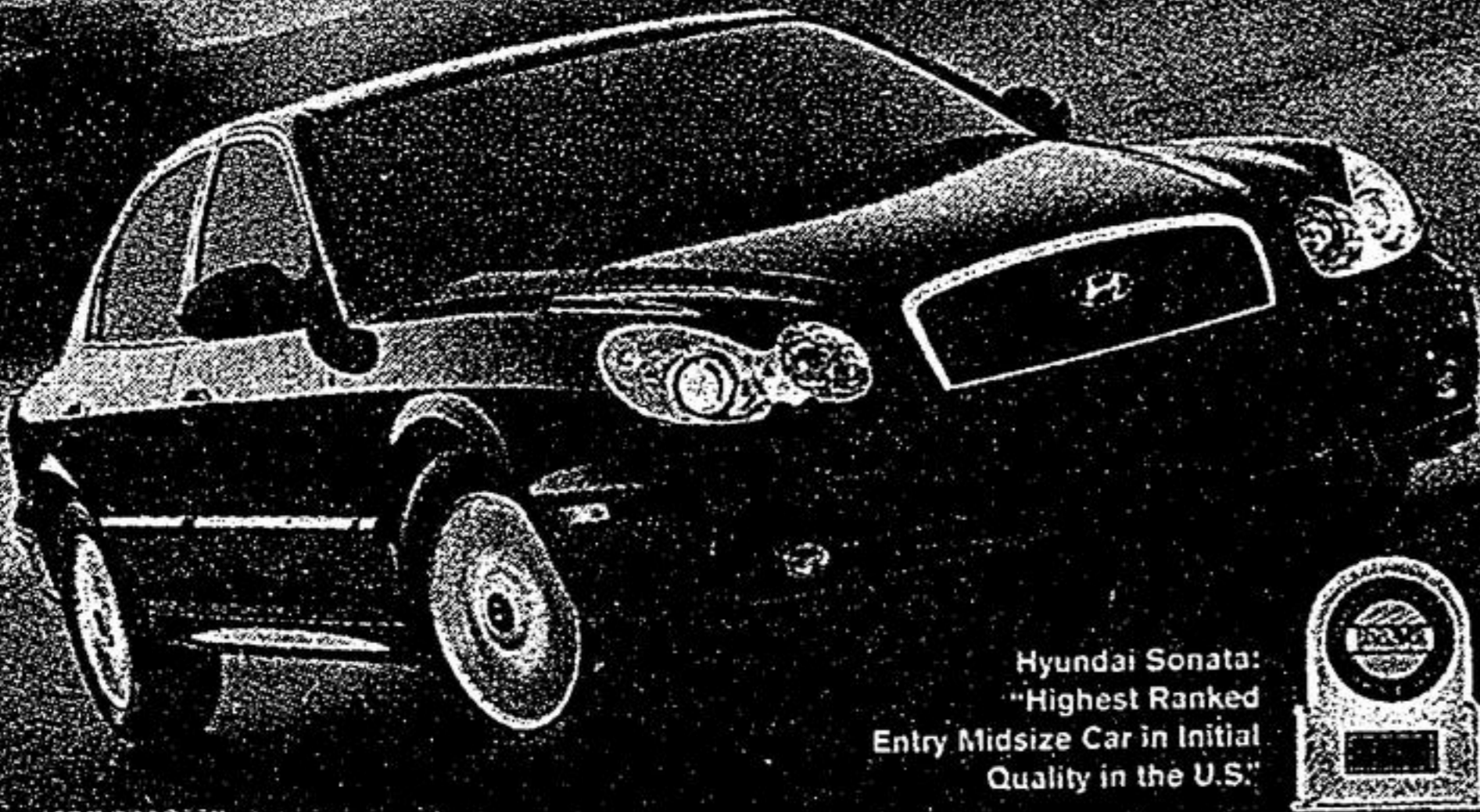
"There can be inherited factors and tendencies toward depression."

Family and peer support are key to the success of any patient, Mr. Schmelefske said. Parents and guardians are expected to participate in the treatment process by joining a group program that uses peer contact.

For information on Southlake's Eating Disorder Programs, call 905-895-4521, ext. 2130.

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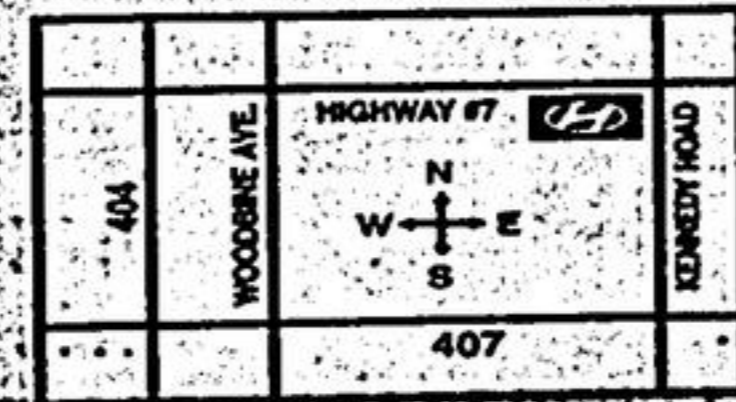
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