

Want a doctor? Order pizza

CRISIS BY NUMBERS

► **DROP IN DOCTORS:** Ontario is short 2,353 doctors. By 2010, that deficit will reach 2,828.

► **THIRD WORST:** Ontario, with one MD for every 566 patients, has the third worst patient-to-physician ratio in Canada.

► **WE'RE GETTING OLDER:** There are 179,300 people aged 55 to 89 in York. By 2031, this age group is projected to more than double to 473,100. The 80 to 84 age group will increase from 11,100 today to 40,100 in 2031.

► **READY TO RETIRE:** Nineteen per cent of MDs are over 60 and 11 per cent are over 65.

BRINGING IN DOCTORS

The Ontario Medical Association recommends to counter the loss of doctors:

► **ELIMINATE** barriers that keep doctors who are working abroad from returning.

► **ALLOW** freer movement of physicians between provinces.

► **ESTABLISH** an action committee on the family medicine crisis and

► **ELIMINATE** restrictions and penalties in effect for re-entry positions.

BY MICHAEL POWER
Staff Writer

A warning for those contemplating a move to York Region: if you think the area will offer a healthier lifestyle than Toronto in the coming decades, think twice.

With the region's population expected to hit 1.5 million people by 2031, expect more pressure on health services, including the ratio of doctors to patients.

You might also see longer commutes and worsening air and water quality, as well as less luck finding recreational area where you can exercise such as parks.

Landing more doctors will help service the region's expanding population. But finding those doctors will take a better effort on the part of the province, Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi said.

"I think they are doing things that need to be done (to employ more doctors)," Mr. Grossi said. "But they are things that should have been done 10 or 12 years ago. So now we're playing catch up - these kinds of things don't happen overnight."

That includes ensuring doctors who come here from overseas can get accredited in Ontario and start practising here as soon as possible.

The province has already dubbed Georgina an underserved area for doctors and provided the municipality with funds to help fix the problem.

That has put the town in the unique position of being able to actively scout for health care workers, Mayor Grossi said. For example, two nurse practitioners have recently started working at the Georgina Medical Centre and another is scheduled to start soon.

"There's a lot of work being done in the Town of Georgina to attract doctors," he said. "We've been very proactive over the last few years and even more so in the last few months."

But advertising for new doctors - and attracting them to a rural area - remains a work in progress, said Gary Shienfeld, vice-president of the Georgina Community Health Care Council.

The town recently bought the long-standing Georgina Medical Centre.

"Our mandate is to attract and maintain physicians and, in order to do that, we need a place to house them," he said. "Those facilities will help attract doctors."

As far as Oak Ridges MP Frank Klees is concerned, there are plenty of doctors to go around. The key is making sure physicians here get qualified to practise as quickly as possible.

"One of the quickest ways to get a doctor in the GTA is to call 967-1111 (Pizza Pizza's number) because we have so many doctors delivering pizzas these days," he said.

"Ontario isn't suffering a shortage of



In this comprehensive series discussing the region's burgeoning growth and how best to manage it, we will delve into the following topics:

March 16: Planning for growth

March 23: Economics of growth

March 30: Growing green

TODAY: Healthy communities

April 13: Livable lifestyles

April 20: Getting around

If you missed an earlier topic, check it out at www.yorkregion.com

doctors. They simply aren't allowed to practise and many of these are foreign doctors.

The first step is to lower the barriers that keep those physicians from practising here, Mr. Klees said.

That includes creating more residency spaces for doctors who are otherwise qualified to practise in Ontario.

What will York Region's doctor situation look like in 20 years if that doesn't happen?

"We can't even allow ourselves to imagine those circumstances," Mr. Klees said.

But doctors focus on treating illness. York Region residents must also have the tools to stay fit and healthy in the coming decades.

And suburban housing developments don't always give people those tools, retired York University professor Edmund Fowler said.

"What's been shown in spades is that the air quality in the suburbs is worse than the air quality downtown," said Mr. Fowler, who taught municipal government for 30 years at the university's Glendon College.

People who live in suburban neighbourhoods often have fewer opportunities to walk and

cycle compared to those living in urban centres, Mr. Fowler added.

In fact, a report from the Ontario College of Family Physicians notes the loops, crescents and cul-de-sacs of suburban neighbourhoods keeps residents behind the wheel.

"Urban sprawl communities separate people's homes from stores, offices, services and restaurants," the report reads. "This makes it nearly impossible for people to carry out errands or go to work without using their cars."

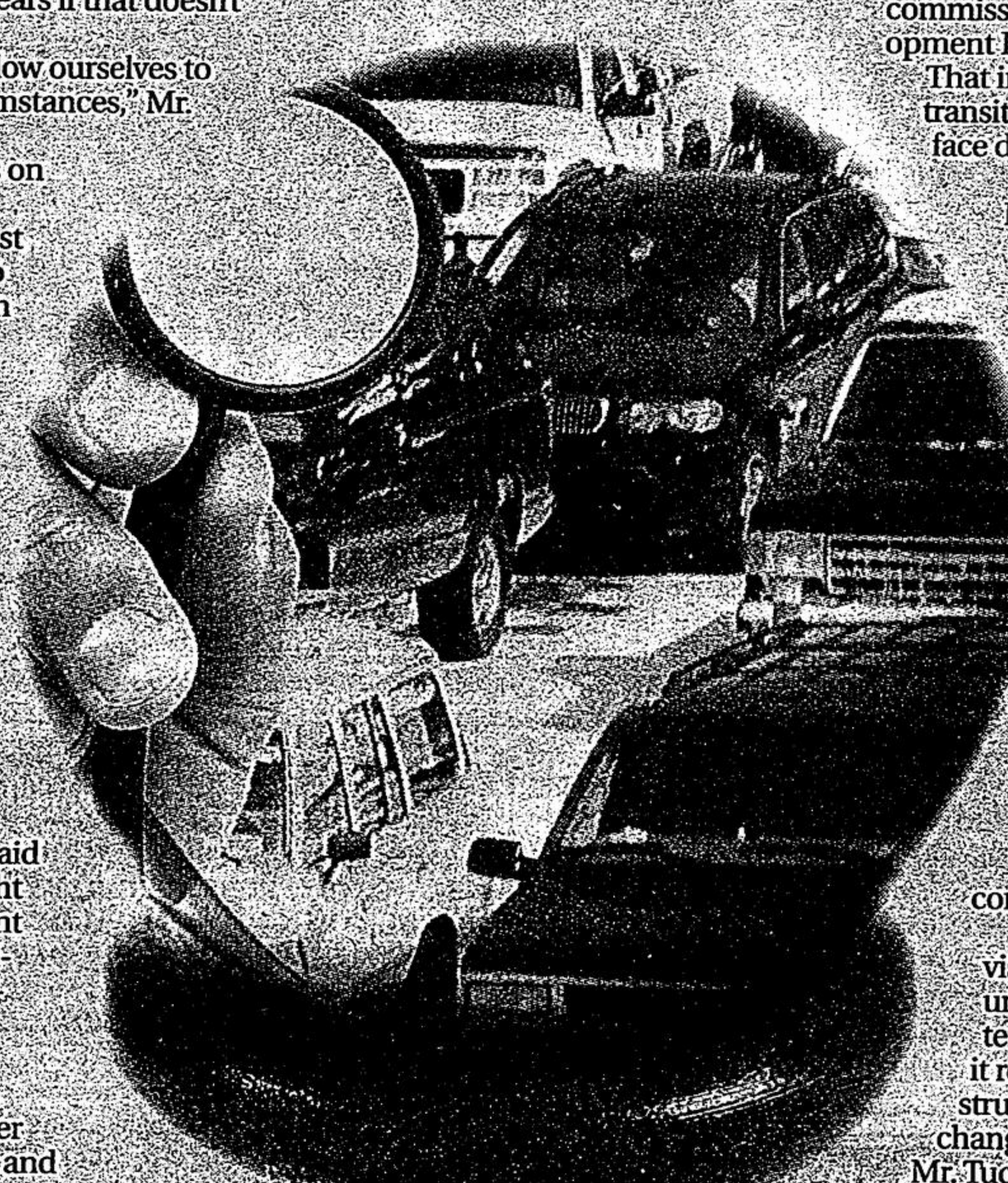
That can lead to higher rates of obesity among those living in suburban communities - and obesity isn't cheap. The problem caused more than 4,000 deaths 2000 and ran up a \$4.3 billion bill for Canada's health care system.

And the oceanic parking lots found at suburban strip malls causes rain to pick up oil, gas and other substances before draining off. That can hurt the quality of water and soil found in GTA regions such as York, Mr. Fowler said.

"It goes from class A farmland to polluted, compacted soil," he said. "Once you pave over land like that it's extremely difficult to get it back."

Mr. Fowler pointed to limiting growth through an urban growth boundary as a possible way to improve the health of residents. Such a boundary would limit the distance housing developments would be allowed to sprawl outward and, hopefully, limit the health concerns that come with suburban development.

"But I



GARY SHIENFELD: Georgina Community Health Council vice-president says attracting doctors remains a challenge.

know developers will scream," he said. "Urban growth boundaries were introduced in Oregon in the 1970s. The boundaries have helped that state protect land and reduce air pollution," said David Bragdon, president of Oregon's regional planning agency.

But by concentrating services and living areas within urban space, the boundaries also encourage people to walk or ride bicycles instead of hopping behind the wheel, Mr. Bragdon said.

"In the end, more walkable areas means that people will end up walking more," he said.

York has plans to make its communities more dense and connected, said commissioner of planning and development Bryan Tuckey.

That includes beefing up public transit to ease the crush commuters face during rush hour.

An example is Downtown Markham, a planned compact community bordered by hwy. 7 and 407, Warden Avenue and Kennedy Road, that will feature housing, employment and other uses. (For more on the project visit yorkregion.com and click on Growth for a video story.)

Allowing for a more mixed land use will create more jobs in the region. That shorter commute will cut air pollution and encourage people to walk or cycle to work.

The region also hopes to connect cycling trails, he added. "That is very much the vision of our council and urban structure for the long term in York Region. And I think it really begins to change the structure of the region and will change the health of the region," Mr. Tuckey said.

Click here for opinions

I'm not responsible for your children.

We've sunk so far into the nanny state syndrome that we've even got Conservatives dumping billions of dollars into child care. With the Tory plan that's \$1,200 for each kid per year, while the loopy Liberals and out-to-

lunch NDP are screaming for a national subsidized daycare plan. More billions.

The Grits and N-Dippers are even threatening to topple Harper's minority government if they don't get their way. (Sound like spoiled brats throwing a temper tantrum to me).

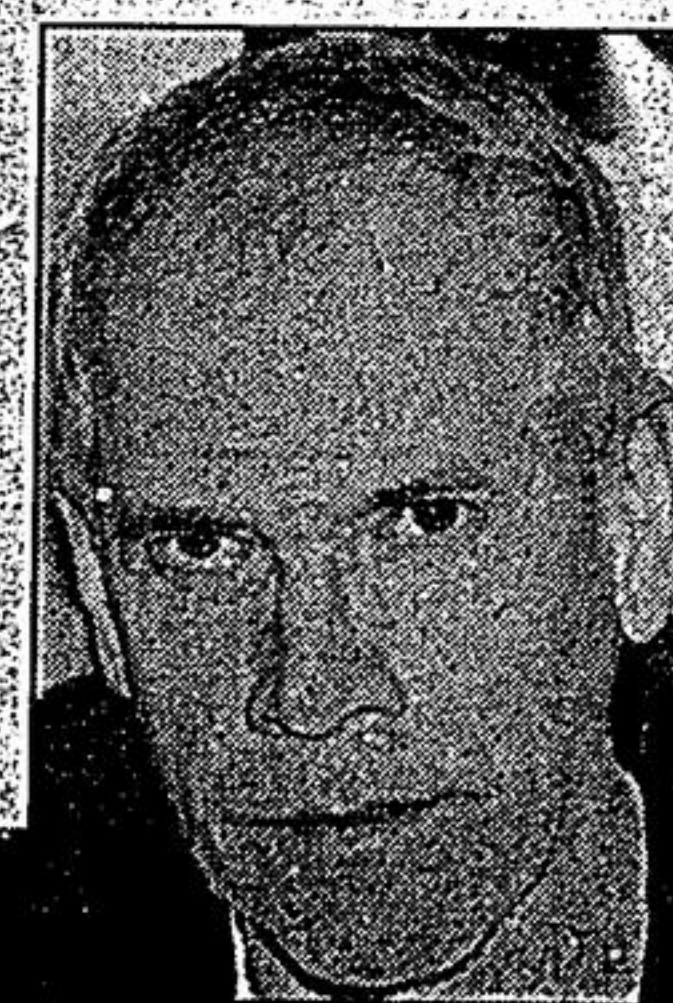
What has the lefties in a lather...

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You'll find the rest in John's blog on yorkregion.com



Read John Slykhuys: "In the Right" in our **BLOGS** section