

HEALTH: 41 per cent of York Region residents overweight

# Grim results in foundation report

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York Region residents are losing the battle of the bulge, according to a Heart and Stroke Foundation survey released yesterday.

The national online survey found 62 per cent of respondents reported intentionally losing five or more pounds during the past five years, but failed to keep the weight off. And, seven of 10 of those who were overweight or obese regained all, or even more, pounds after their weight-loss.

Obesity and being overweight have become one of the leading public health concerns in Canada, Heart and Stroke Foundation spokesperson and internal medicine specialist Dr. Sean Wharton said.

We know that within the past 30 years, the prevalence of obesity doubled in the 40 to 69 age group and tripled among those 20 to 39, he said.

Specific to York Region, the survey found 41 per cent of us are overweight or obese and 13 per cent of residents 12 or older have high blood pressure. The health implications are alarming, experts agree.

More than 6,800 York residents are hospitalized a year for heart disease and stroke related conditions.

York's statistics are slightly below the national average, Dr. Wharton said, but offer little comfort.

"It doesn't mean York is doing well because the weight trends are going upwards," he said.

Equally concerning is the foundation's declaration young adults, ages 20 to 39, are Canada's new at risk group.

Within this age group, three million are inactive, 2.5 million are overweight or obese, two million smoke, 164,000 have high blood pressure and 66,000 have diabetes.

"This cohort may not outlive their parents," Dr. Wharton said.

Excess weight and extra body fat around your waist can lead to high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol levels and Type 2 diabetes, increasing your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Young Canadians spend the most on weight loss, the survey states.

"Obesity is environmental and at every turn. There aren't enough parks and sidewalks and healthy food choices at convenience locations," Dr. Wharton said.

There's also excessive attention to inappropriate weight loss strategies, such as quick fix and fad diets, colon cleansing and pills.

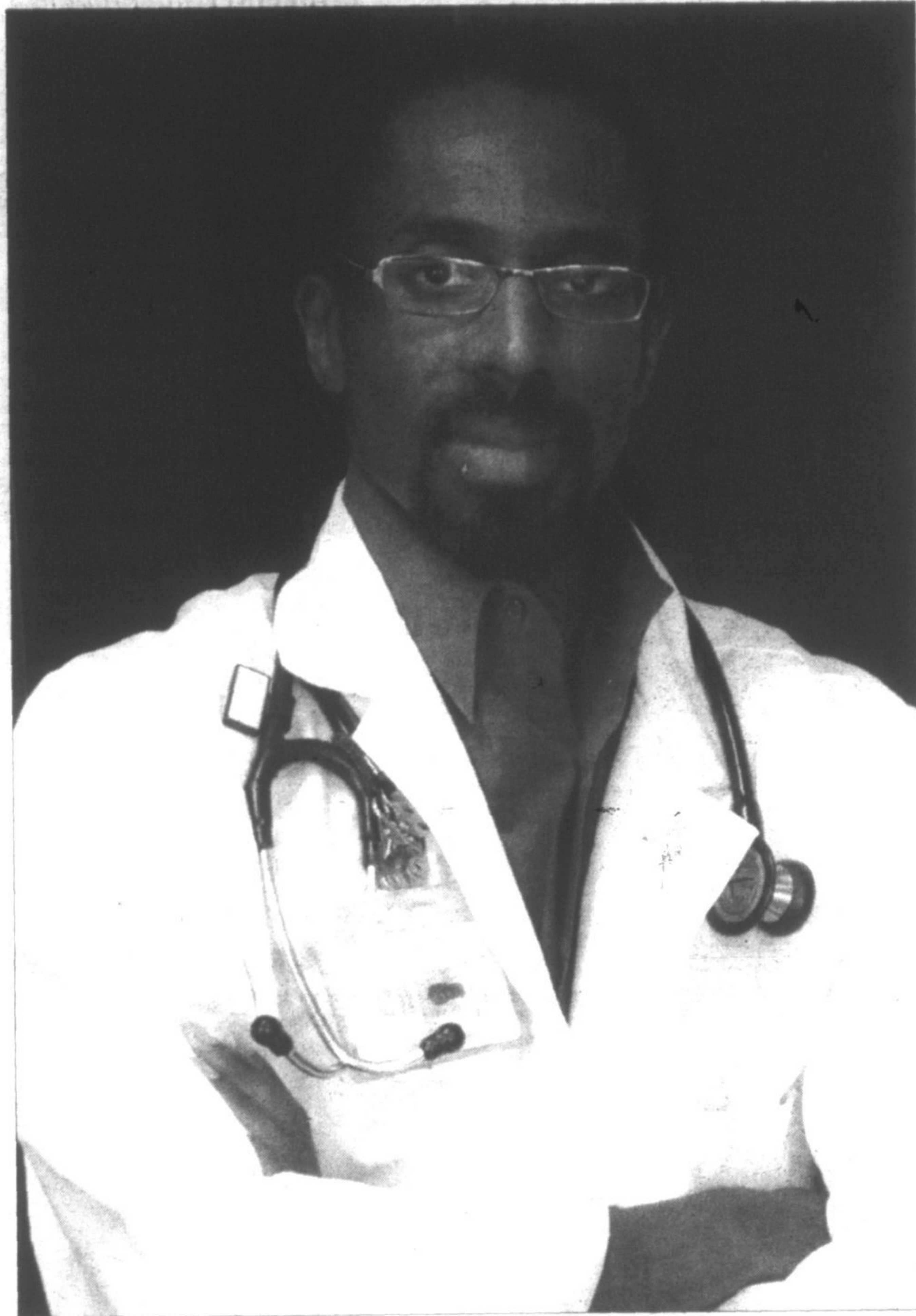
"They sell hope in a bottle and nothing else," he said.

In total, almost four out of every 10 people who try to lose weight report spending money to do so.

The report serves up tell tale signs behaviors, particularly in younger people, aren't healthy, Southlake Regional Health Centre Cardiac Prevention and Rehabilitation Services manager Terry Fair said.

The younger at risk demographic surprised him.

"People are eating wrong and too much and there's not enough physical activity," he said.



Dr. Sean Wharton said the number of cases of obesity found in people 20 to 39 years of age has tripled in the past 30 years. Excess weight and extra body fat can lead to high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol levels and Type 2 diabetes, increasing your chances of heart disease and stroke.

Heart disease patients, enrolled in Southlake's six-month program, are coached and encouraged to increase exercise.

They receive food quality and quantity education and are monitored.

Losing weight and keeping it off should be your long-term goal, both Dr. Wharton and Mr. Fair said.

"Your doctor, for example, can help keep you motivated by showing you benefits that don't show up on a weigh scale such as positive changes to your blood pressure, your cholesterol and other markers of health," Dr. Wharton said.

However, only one out of every four overweight Canadian, 20 to 69, reported their doctor counselled them to lose weight, the foundation's survey noted.

Among the survey respondents ages 20 to 39 and overweight, only 12 per cent reported their doctors had told them to lose weight, increasing to 28 per cent among those 40 to 59, and 32 per cent among those 60 to 69 years old.

"The good news is that most Canadians feel comfortable talking with their

doctor about their weight and feel weight is part of their doctor's responsibility for health," Dr. Wharton said.

"There may be a time issue. Thirty per cent of Canadians feel their doctor doesn't have the time to deal with weight, but it's important that more Canadians have these conversations. Talking to their doctor and asking to have their waist circumference measured can be an important first step towards starting important conversations about the health effects of being overweight."

The study findings aren't new to York Region Public Health nutritionist Nancy Bevilacqua.

People should also seek the expertise of a registered dietitian, she said.

"They aren't covered by OHIP," she said.

"People can lobby at their workplace to have dietitians added to their benefits."

For more information on the foundation's healthy weight action plan, visit [heartandstroke.ca/hwplan](http://heartandstroke.ca/hwplan)

## Delivering hope with patients

This is cancer month - the Canadian Cancer Society's annual residential

canvass.

The campaign begins today and concludes April 30.

I have a route, a relatively short door-knocker that extends west along Rupert Avenue from Westlawn Crescent to Palmwood Gate.

I count it a privilege to be asked and an honour to participate.

While the task, including call-backs, may take two hours, it pales in comparison with those who give much more.

I refer to local drivers who regularly transport patients to and from cancer treatment centres in Toronto, Oshawa and Newmarket.

These people are, to me, the unsung heroes in an ongoing fight against this dreaded disease. I talked with one last week.

Murray Wagg, 79, is among 10 Whitchurch-Stouffville volunteer drivers. Others include transportation co-ordinator Janet Campbell, George Sled, Ted Barry, Dave Wicksted, Jack Greenshields, Bob Gatfield, Hardy Nissen, Jack Corcoran, Peter Robertson and Gisla Bradler.

Weekly, sometimes twice-weekly, these folks pick up patients at their homes and deliver them directly to one of several hospitals, usually Sunnybrook, Princess Margaret or Toronto General. Once there, they can wait several hours until treatments are complete.

"For some patients, it's their only way of getting there," says Janet Campbell. "For those facing serious medical problems, it takes some of the worry off their minds."

For Murray Wagg, recent recipient of a 25-year cancer society pin, this mission of mercy began in 1987. It was Stouffville's Barb Schell who requested his assistance to which Murray immediately responded. Other drivers then were Les Clarke, Bud Sander-son and John Wylie.

Travelling to and from Toronto presents no problem for Murray, even during rush hours. Thirty-seven years' employment with the A.C. Nielsen Co.,



## Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

taught him to endure the pressures of bumper-to-bumper traffic.

"You go with the flow," he says.

If the timing's right, he can travel from Stouffville to Sunnybrook in less than 45 minutes. If it's not, it can take up to two hours.

Until recently, volunteer drivers had parking privileges at Princess Margaret Hospital. Now, he must park in the Toronto General Hospital garage, east of University Avenue. Murray usually awaits a cellphone call, then makes his pick-up.

Treatment times are often uncertain, he says. He never puts pressure on patients.

"It's not their fault if procedures run late. I count it a privilege to help."

Murray honestly admits it bothers him greatly to see patients in pain.

"Cancer's an insidious disease that often rears its ugly head in other forms," he says.

"I never cease to be amazed at the courage people show, how they continually cling to hope. We all hear of little miracles. These are threads on which to hold. One should never give up."

Over the past 25 years, some of his patient passengers have been close neighbours and friends.

"I've known most of them," he says.

Many drivers or members of their families are cancer survivors, he said.

He places the recovery rate at 75 per cent. One of this number is wife Lorna.

While modest concerning his own contributions, Murray's quick to praise the dedication of others, assistance that, in the overall scheme of things, makes 14 house calls seem rather trivial.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.