



A DISCUSSION ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS IN YORK REGION: A SIX-PART SERIES

BY JEREMY GRIMALDI  
jgrimaldi@yrmg.com

# More emphatic approach to mental illness interaction with cops needed

**C**onst. Jon Carson will never forget the day he was called to the home of a woman who had just given birth into a toilet.

In the aftermath, it was he and a paramedic on scene who were charged with removing the baby.

Although the baby's pulse did eventually return, it died soon after.

The traumatic incident stayed with Carson for the next two years, resulting in what he would call a "downward spiral" that would leave him in a vulnerable state, suffering from nightmares, flashbacks and close to losing his family and his job as he self medicated his ongoing anguish with drink.

It was only after much of the damage had been done that he regained a firmer grip and was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), one of the countless conditions, which includes anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, dementia, obsessive compulsive disorder, that blight people's minds on a daily basis in York Region and around the world.

For Carson, at least a part of the blame for his troubles was caused by an unwritten police code, which expects officers to "suck it up". Another problem was the lack of availability for counselling.

Once back and fit for service he set about making a change within

the police force and now acts as York police's new training and academic instructor.

But, as with many large organizations rooted in traditional training methods, change has and continues to be slow.

Although training for young officers in ways to deal with people suffering from mental health issues has grown from about 10 hours, at the beginning of the millennium, to about 18 hours, it still lags behind what it should be.

On top of this, a new program called Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) is being offered to about 150 officers each year.

However, officers are still not required to take the course.

Out of York Regional Police's 1,500 officers, only 450 have been trained since 2011 when the program was introduced.

Even though Carson hopes to have the program made mandatory by 2015, many say it should already be in place, especially when you consider the numbers.

Statistics showing that a growing number of mental health calls are being made each year to police across Canada.

Since 2009, the number of calls

to York police involving mental health issues has risen 53 per cent, from 1,960 to 3,000 in 2013.

Toronto police face an even larger problem, facing upward of 20,000 such calls each year.

Canadian prisons are almost half filled with prisoners requiring mental health treatment of some kind.

Annette Jones, vice-president of clinical experiences at Southlake Hospital said mental health issues are a serious cause for concern in the medical industry.

"We're bursting at the seams," she said. "I think what we would all like to see is more resources."

The number of people who are admitted for mental health observation supports her comments.

At Southlake, the number of adults admitted to the mental health unit has grown 41 per cent since 2009-10, from 845 to 1187 in 2013-14.

Children and adolescent numbers have ballooned 86 per cent from 245 in 2009-10 to 487 in 2013-14.

Despite the numbers, Jones does not advocate for more in-hospital treatment.

She prefers services provided in

people's homes.

"Issues that people often experience don't usually suddenly happen, most of the time they build and build," she said.

"We want to avert the crisis to avert desperate situations that necessitate that they are brought to hospital."

The trend is similar at other hospitals in the region.

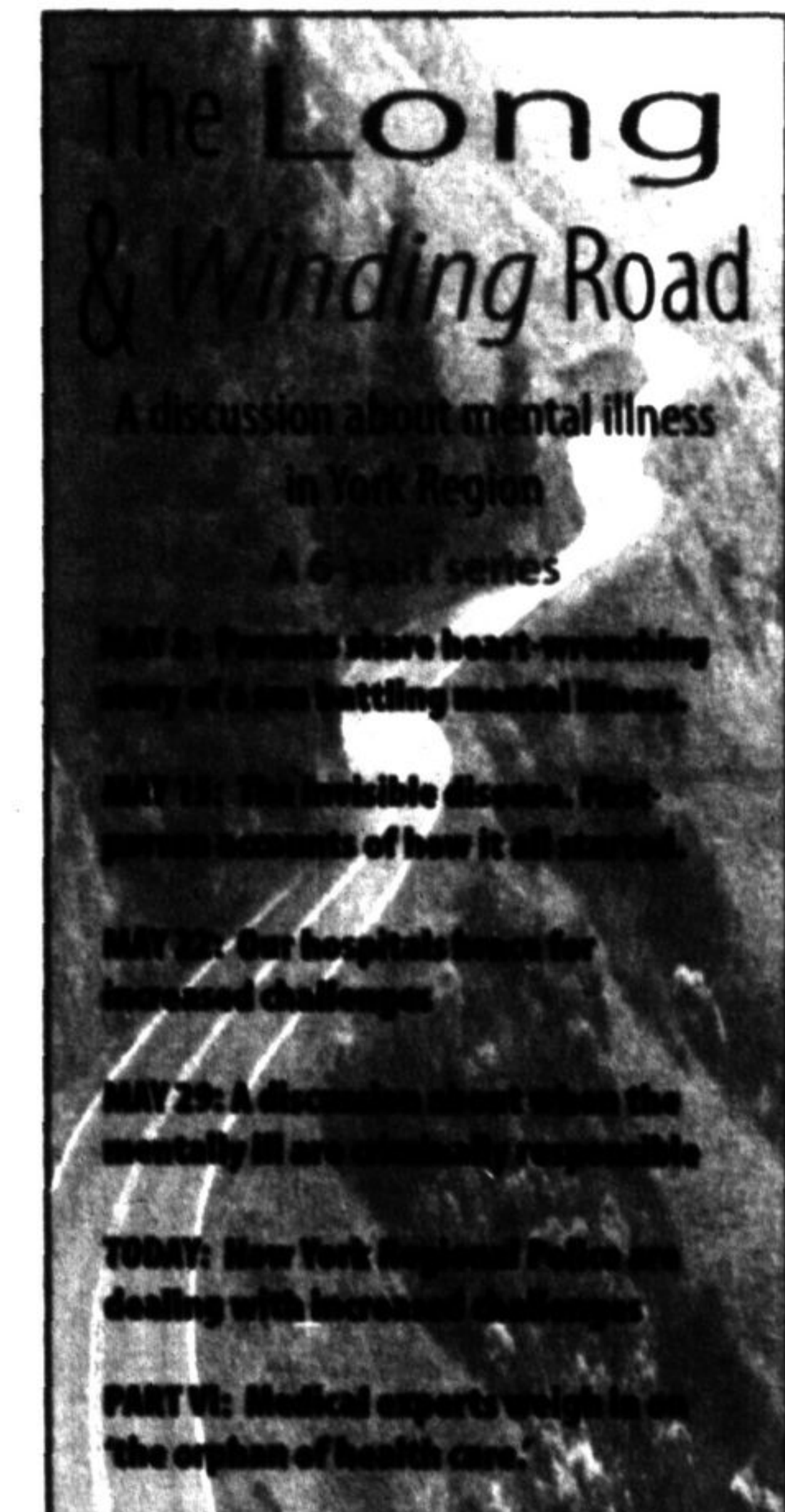
Paul Cappuccio, the director of mental health services at Markham Stouffville Hospital, said it is not more beds we need, rather, a strategy, involving more mental health counselling, outreach and child programs.

"(There's a) lack of resources, lack of money," he said. "If you see how much is spent in Canada compared to the rest of the world ... it's minimal."

The World Health Organization data reveals that depression will be the second leading cause of disease around the world by 2020.

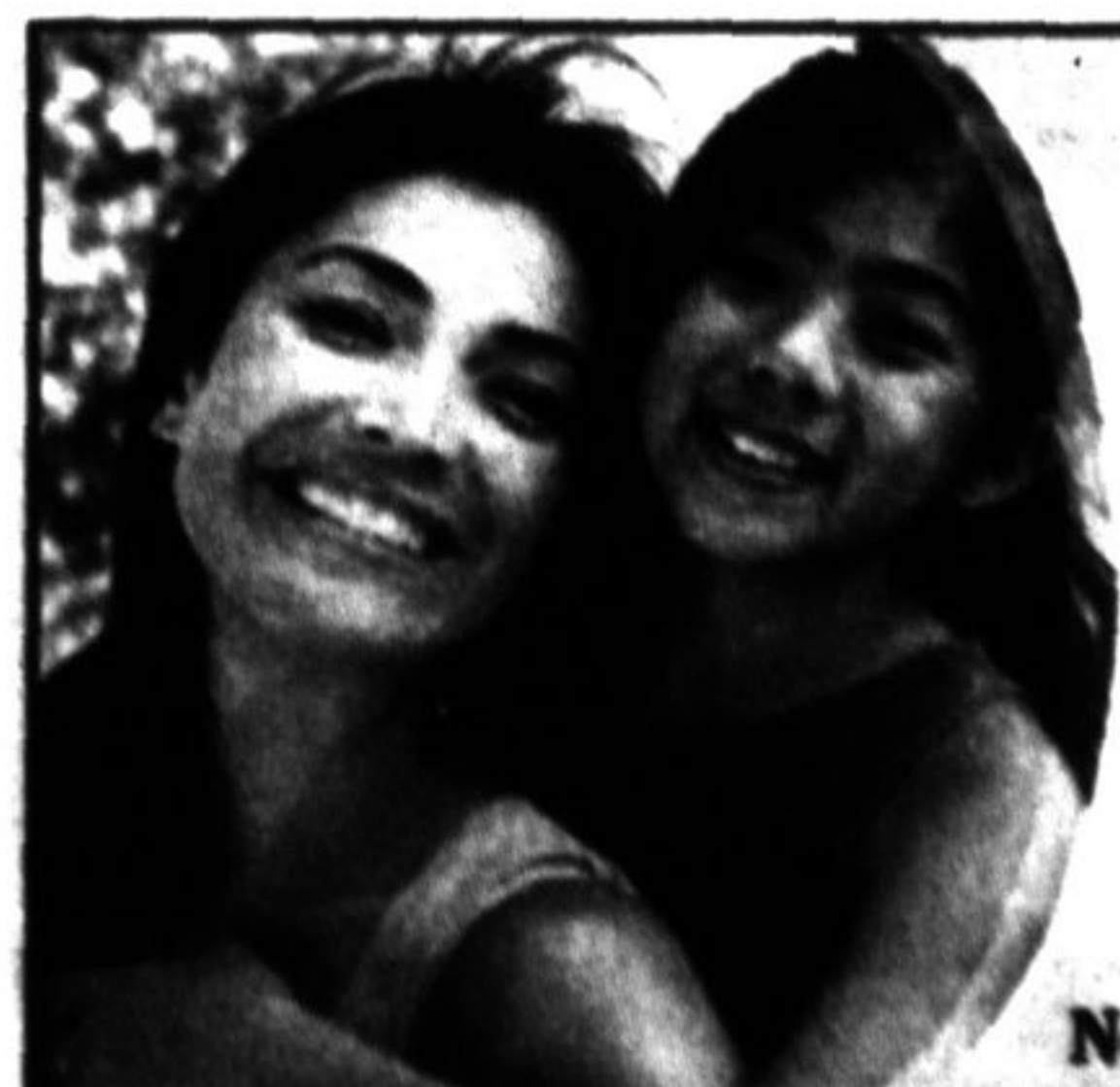
For better or worse, police often remain the first point of contact when mental issues finally boil over.

"It's about everyone, but it gets pushed back on us because we're the first responders," he said.



## GET CONNECTED

➔ READ MORE: To read the story in its entirety or to read other parts of the series, go to [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com)



**WHITENING • VENEERS • BONDING • IMPLANTS • EMERGENCY TREATMENT**  
**Brighten someone's day Smile :)**

The smile of a child, a loved one, a grandparent or a friend can brighten our day and make us smile. Whose day have you brightened with your smile?

**To Book Your Appointment Call 905-640-1010**

New Patients Welcome Emergencies Seen Promptly Insurance Processing

**Dr. Paul Mirkopoulos,**  
BSc., D.D.S.,  
Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

**SmileWork :)**

Stouffville Dental Centre

Creating smiles you'll want to share

5402 Main St., Suite 210 Stouffville, ON L4A 1H3

[www.SmileWork.ca](http://www.SmileWork.ca)