

PART ONE OF SEVEN

## CANCER

A CODE RED PROJECT



PHOTO BY JOHN RENNISON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Terrible continued from // BA1

A GROUNDBREAKING new Spectator investigation suggests social and economic factors play a significant role when it comes to cancer death rates across Hamilton.

An examination of 10 years' worth of cancer data shows that Hamilton has a terrible cancer problem.

It's not a problem related to the quality of care provided, or the availability of resources, and certainly not a question of the dedication of the many specialists at Hamilton's Juravinski Cancer Centre or around the city who treat the disease.

It's a familiar conflict first brought to light in 2010 by The Spectator's landmark Code Red series, which analyzed the health of the city down to the level of neighbourhoods and showed that wealth and health are strongly connected.

Hamilton's cancer problem breaks down along class lines. It's a conflict of social and economic inequalities and the staggering contrasts in health that exist between those who are poor and those who are not.

The Spectator's stunning new investigation shows people living in the poorer parts of Hamilton are dying of cancer at significantly higher rates than people living in the richer parts of the city.

The overall death rate from all types of cancers combined in Hamilton's inner-city core was almost 90 per cent higher than the cancer death rate in Ancaster, Hamilton's wealthiest suburb.

The data, provided exclusively to The Spectator by Cancer Care Ontario, covers the years 2000 to 2009.

In Hamilton's inner-city core between Queen Street and



PHOTO BY GARY YOKOYAMA, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

*'People are beating a path to our door, so we sit in our offices and sit in our institutions and wait for people to show up.'*

**DR. BILL EVANS**  
FORMER HEAD, JURAVINSKI  
CANCER CENTRE

Parkdale Avenue from Main Street to the waterfront, the overall cancer mortality rate was nearly 73 deaths for every 1,000 people aged 45 and older over that 10-year period. In Ancaster, the rate was almost 39 deaths per 1,000 people aged 45 and older.

Whether it's all cancers combined, whether it's just men or just women, or whether it's the four most common types of cancer — lung, breast, prostate and colorectal — on their own, the picture is always the same: the death rates are higher each

time in the poorer former City of Hamilton than they are in the five richer suburbs of Stoney Creek, Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough and Glanbrook averaged together.

Over the next week, this unprecedented investigation of cancer at the neighbourhood level will look at the stark inequalities that exist in Hamilton between those who get cancer, those who die from it and why those inequalities exist.

Some of the reasons touch on health issues, such as cancer screening rates and access to basic medical care. Some of the reasons touch on social and economic issues.

Sometimes, as the original Code Red project showed, those health, social and economic issues are so tightly interwoven that it's impossible to tug them apart.

You'll read stories of a dying woman, a man who has spent 10 years on cancer's death row and others who have fought cancer and won. You'll also read about people who treat the disease in Hamilton and recognize the health disparities that exist in the city.

In some cases, the differences in cancer death rates between the richer suburbs and the poorer lower city are massive.

More than 12,200 people died of cancer in the amalgamated City of Hamilton between 2000 and 2009, and nearly three-quarters of those deaths were people who lived in the former City of Hamilton, a significantly disproportionate number based on its share of the population.

## ABOUT THE SERIES

CANCER: A CODE RED PROJECT, is a seven-part series which examines the role of socioeconomic factors on the chances of getting cancer and the chances of surviving it.

## TODAY

The Enemy Within

## MONDAY

Focus on: Breast cancer

## TUESDAY

Focus on: Colorectal cancer

## WEDNESDAY

Focus on: Lung cancer

## THURSDAY

Focus on: Prostate cancer

## FRIDAY

Focus on: Burlington, Grimsby and Brantford

## SATURDAY

The Enemy Within — Conclusion

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Steve Buist** has won three National Newspaper Awards, 17 Ontario Newspaper Awards and he's been named Canada's Investigative Journalist of the Year three times. He has been writing about the serious impacts of the social determinants of health in Hamilton since the original Code Red series was published in 2010.

See **How We Did It**, page BA3, for more details on the rates and our methodology.

The glaring social and economic disparities between the poorest and wealthiest parts of Hamilton contributed to thousands of deaths from cancer in the city. What's worse is that many of those deaths were preventable.

If the former City of Hamilton had the same cancer mortality rate as Ancaster, for example, there would have been 3,438 fewer deaths between 2000 and 2009 in the former city.

That's almost one a day.

It's a number equal to all of the people living in the chunk of Hamilton between Sherman Avenue and Gage Avenue from Main Street to the escarpment.

It's enough dead people to fill 15 per cent of all the burial plots at the Hamilton Cemetery on York Boulevard.

The differences in mortality at a neighbourhood level are even more jaw-dropping.

The overall cancer death rate in the worst neighbourhood — an inner-city piece of Hamilton between James and Wellington streets from King to Cannon streets — was more than four times higher than it was in the neighbourhood with the lowest death rate — the part of Ancaster between Garner Road, Fiddler's Green Road and Wilson Street.

The median family income for that Ancaster neighbourhood was just under \$100,000, according to the 2006 census. In the inner-city neighbourhood, it was \$31,500 — well below the poverty line for a typical family of four.

**Astounding** continues // BA4

## TWO NEW CODE RED RESOURCES UNVEILED ON THESPEC.COM



WITH THE LAUNCH of Code Red: Cancer, The Spectator is also offering readers two new comprehensive web-based resources:

## INTERACTIVE CANCER MAP

The Spectator's Pete Smaluck has developed a cutting-edge interactive map that provides readers with a wide range of options to help sift through the cancer data that was used as the basis for the Code Red: Cancer project.

For those just interested in

basic information, the maps show cancer incidence and mortality rates, as well as key social and economic data, for each of Hamilton's 135 census tracts. The maps also show incidence and mortality rates at the neighbourhood level for men and women as well as four specific types of cancer — lung, breast, prostate and colorectal.

For those who want to explore the data in greater detail, there are filters that show how cancer rates are connected to indicators such as family income, education lev-

els, visible minority levels and how the rates change across parts of the city.

There's also a search function that allows you to match a street address or landmark to its proper census tract.

To experience the interactive map, go to **thespec.com**.

## ONE-STOP CODE RED WEBSITE

The Spectator is unveiling a new Code Red website that provides access to all Code Red-related

projects and content that has been published since April 2010.

The new site provides free access to the original 2010 Code Red project, 2011's BORN series, this year's Barton Street project, the new cancer project as well as other Code Red-related articles and editorials. The new website also includes the Vital Signs projects that have been published in conjunction with the Hamilton Community Foundation. To visit the new Code Red website, go to **thespec-codered.com**.