

# THE 12 KEY DETERMINING FACTORS OF HEALTH

## 1. Income and Social Status

These two are the most important determinants of health. Health status improves at each step up the income/social hierarchy. High income determines living conditions such as safe housing and ability to buy sufficient good food. Healthiest populations are those in societies which are prosperous and have equitable distribution of wealth.

## 2. Social Support Networks

Support from families, friends and communities is associated with better health. These networks can be important in helping people solve problems and deal with adversity, as well as in maintaining a sense of control over life circumstances.

## 3. Education and Literacy

Education contributes by equipping people with knowledge and skills for problem solving, and helps provide a sense of control and mastery over life. It increases opportunities for job and income security, and improves ability to access and understand information to help keep them healthy.

## 4. Employment and Working Conditions

Unemployment, underemployment, stressful or unsafe work are associated with poorer health. People who have more control over work circumstances and fewer stress-related job demands are healthier and often live longer than those in more stressful, riskier work.

## 5. Social Environments

Importance of social support also extends to the broader community. Civic vitality refers to strength of social networks within a community, region, province or country.

## 6. Physical Environments

Physical environment is an important determinant. At certain levels of exposure, contaminants in air, water, food and soil can cause adverse health effects, including cancer.

## 7. Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills

Actions by which individuals can prevent diseases and promote self-care, cope with challenges, develop self-reliance, solve problems and make choices that enhance health.

## 8. Healthy Child Development

The effects of early experiences on brain development, school readiness and health in later life shows early child development is a powerful health determinant. A young person's development is greatly affected by housing and neighbourhood, family income, level of parents' education, access to nutritious foods and physical recreation.

## 9. Biology and Genetic Endowment

Basic biology/organic make up of the human body are a fundamental determinant. Genetic endowment provides an inherited predisposition to a range of individual responses that affect health status.

## 10. Health Services

Health services—particularly those designed to maintain and promote health, to prevent disease, and to restore health—contribute to population health.

## 11. Gender

Gender refers to the array of society-determined roles, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Many health issues are a function of gender-based social status or roles.

## 12. Culture

Some may face risks due to an environment largely determined by dominant cultural values that contribute to perpetuation of conditions—marginalization and lack of access to culturally appropriate health care and services.

Mistake continued from // BA10

And I'm someone with a degree in human biology who has written cancer stories for years.

It can't be right, I said, there has to be a mistake. As you've likely guessed, there was no mistake.

Of course, it also means she has a 40 per cent chance of not developing breast cancer in her lifetime. I had, and still have, a hard time seeing it that way.

I cried a lot that night. Oh how I cried.

I cried for a future that sud-

denly seemed a lot scarier. I cried at the thought of my little girl sitting alone in a parking lot trying to digest this news while at the same time putting on a brave face for her father.

This isn't the way it's supposed to be. Facing the mortality of your parents and grandparents is one thing, but contemplating your own child's mortality? It's almost inconceivable.

We agreed to meet for dinner at Ikea the next night. She walked through the doors hand in hand with my grandson, who

was not quite three years old at the time, and I once again dissolved in tears. We stood hugging in the lobby, the three of us, me sobbing like a baby, holding her and my grandson as tightly as I could. I'm sure it was quite a spectacle for other shoppers.

If there's a bright side to this story, it's this: a lot of machinery has now been lined up to vigilantly monitor my daughter's health regularly.

She now has a team of people looking out for her and if something bad does happen in the future, that vigilance combined

with early detection should sharply reduce the consequences.

But there is still fear. Such is the power of cancer.

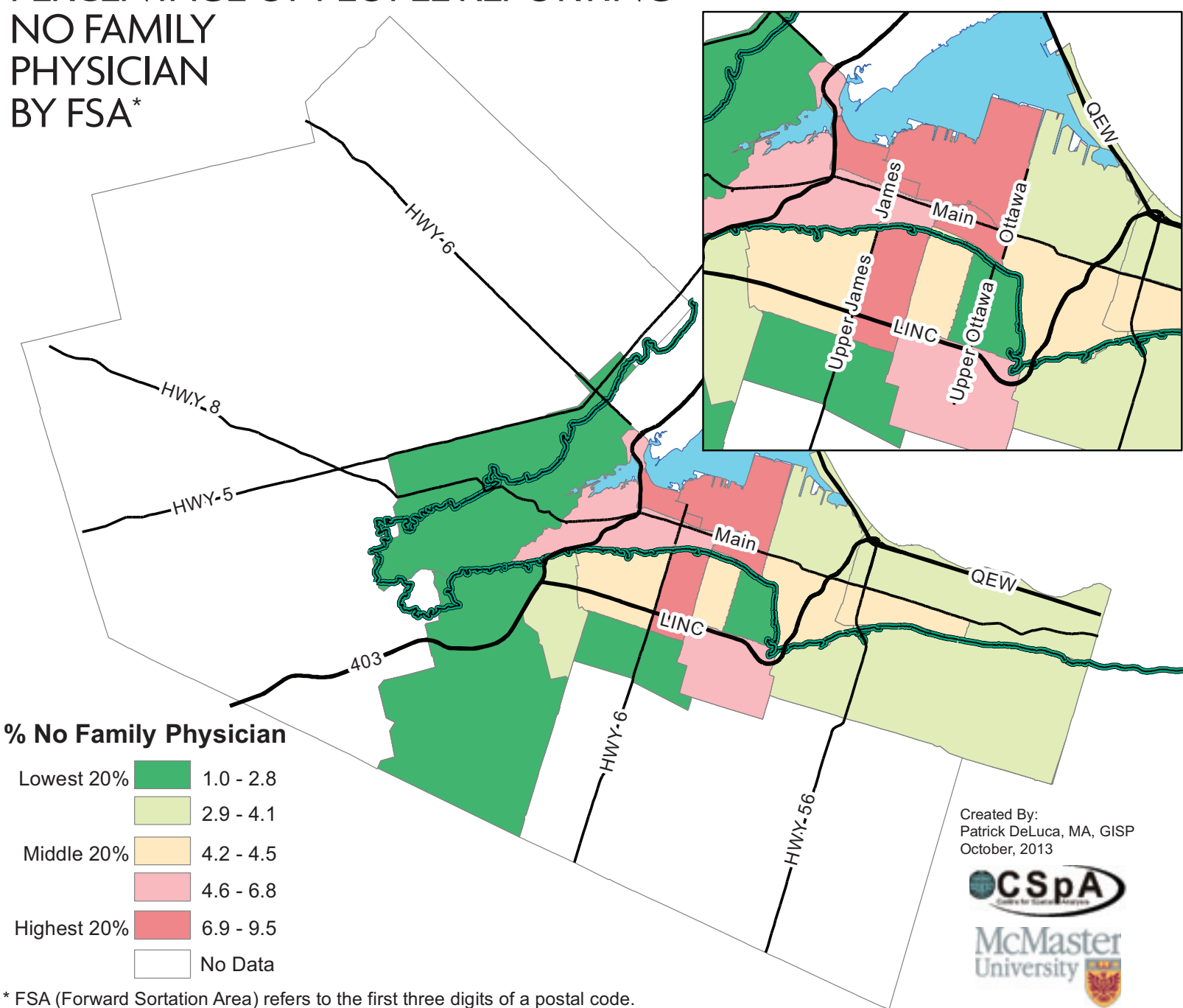
I received some good advice from a wise person I know who has several acquaintances carrying the same genetic marker, and it's advice I quickly passed on to my daughter.

"Live your life like you're in the 40 per cent but take care of your body like you're in the 60 per cent."

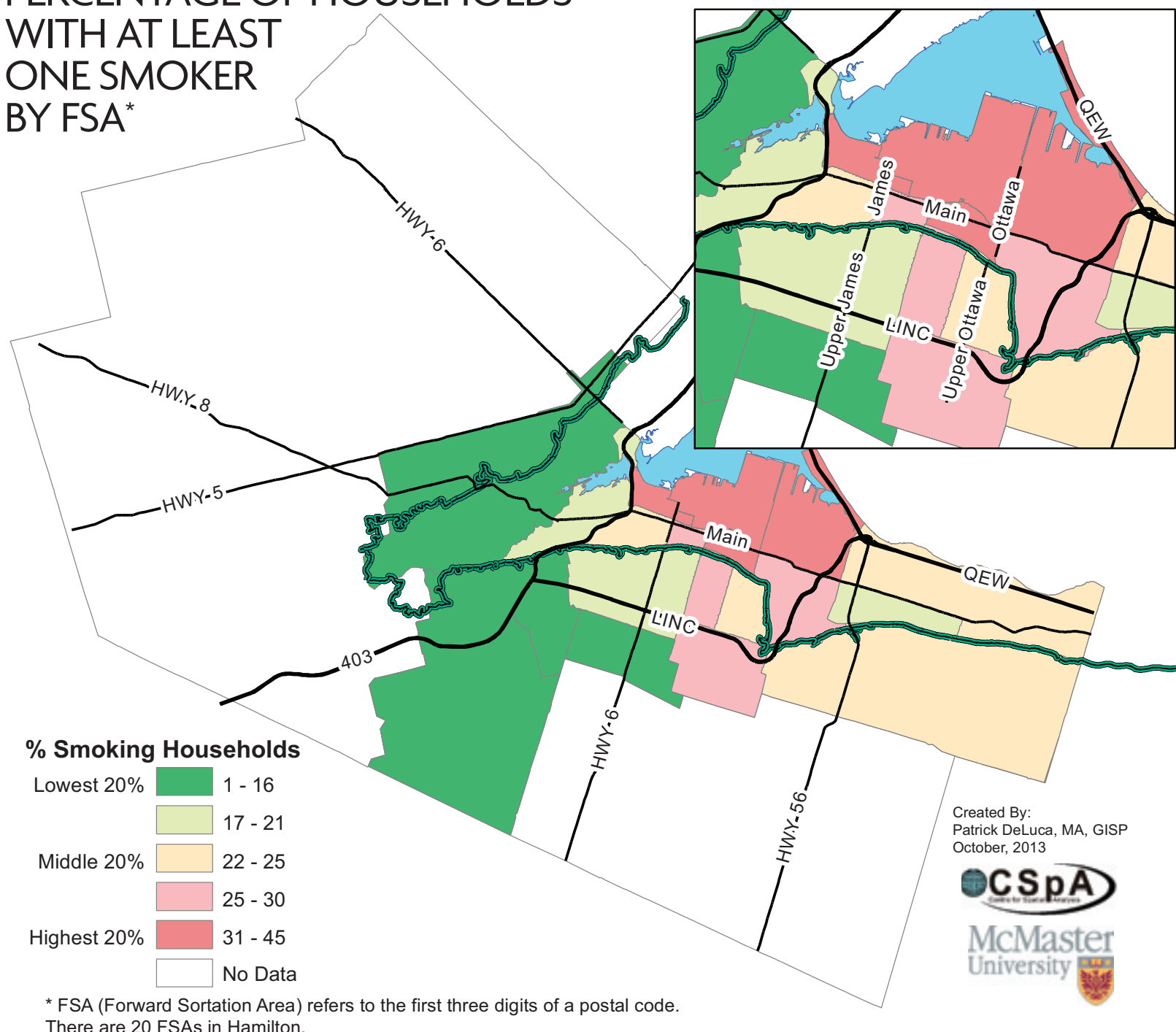
That's probably good advice for everyone.

Lucky continues // BA12

## PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE REPORTING NO FAMILY PHYSICIAN BY FSA\*



## PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH AT LEAST ONE SMOKER BY FSA\*



SOURCE: WHAT MAKES CANADIANS HEALTHY OR UNHEALTHY, BY THE PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA