

Fitzhugh Mullan, MD

Remembered by African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) CEO Francis Omaswa

Dr Fitzhugh Mullan was born on 22 July 22 1942 and died on 29 November 2019. He was an American physician, writer, educator, and social activist who made a significant contribution to contemporary medical education in Africa, the USA and globally. Among his other major achievements, he was a key contributor in the founding of the Student Health Organization, the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, Seed Global Health, and the Beyond Flexner Alliance. He was a professor of Health Policy and Management and of Pediatrics at the George Washington University in Washington DC, USA.



Medicine degree in Eastern and Southern Africa Universities which he did not understand and support but he made his point without causing offense to the Deans and staff of the Medical Schools in Zambia and Zimbabwe where this subject was raised.

Both the SSAMS and MEPI were resounding successes for Africa and a good measure of the credit for this goes directly to the devotion and hard work of Fitz. The participating schools were supported to implement their programmes and the results were published in peer-reviewed journals, with Fitz at the centre.

I first met Fitz when I was Executive Director of the GHWA at WHO in Geneva when he invited me to speak at one of the meetings he had organised in Washington DC. We kept in touch from that time. During the First Global Forum on Human Resources for Health in March 2008 in Kampala discussions took place on the sidelines to launch the Sub-Saharan African Medical Schools Study (SSAMS) with Joe Kolars, then of the Gates Foundation. The grant for this work was awarded to Fitz at George Washington University. Fitz tapped me for the role of Co-Principal Investigator for the SSAMS, which kicked off in 2009 after I had retired from GHWA.

The launch of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was catalysed by the Kampala Declaration and Agenda for Global Action adopted at the First Global HRH Forum and the report of the SSAMS. Again Fitz teamed up with me at ACHEST and I became a Co-PI with him for the MEPI Coordinating Center, with him leading the GWU Coordinating Center and me leading the African Coordinating Center at ACHEST in Kampala.

During both SSAMS and MEPI, I worked very closely with Fitz and got to know him well in good times and difficult times too. We travelled together all over Africa visiting medical schools and talking to university leaders, faculty and students. He introduced me to Dean Lynn Goldman and leadership of the George Washington University. I was entertained at his house by his wife Irene and also met his mother who was staying with them. Similarly, he got to know my family and we became a well bonded team.

My ACHEST colleague Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde and I found that Fitz took his work very seriously and was meticulous in everything that he did. He was sensitive to the feelings of local people even if he disagreed with them. There is the example of the requirement for the research dissertation for the students of the Master of

Along the way, we got to know the humanity and caring in him, which had become manifest as early as his medical school days when he became the student leader of a social and justice movement. His later career as a Paediatrician and Health Services Administrator is marked with assignments that were about justice and equity including racial justice in the USA. By the time we started to work with him in Africa he had already risen through the ranks in the US Public Health Service to the high position of Assistant Surgeon General.

Apart from SSAMS and MEPI, Fitz supported African Medical Education efforts and was the Chair of the Board of Seed Global Health and supported the founder and CEO Dr Vanessa Kerry to send doctors to African medical schools to beef up the ailing teaching in faculty in these schools. The launch of the African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) as an outcome of MEPI and NEPI testify to the lasting positive contribution of Fitz to contemporary medical education.

Fitz had a generous and loving heart as evidenced by the way he related to me. He coordinated my successful nomination to the membership of the National Academy of Medicine of the USA. When my daughter Freda was diagnosed with cancer, Fitz gave her a copy of his book on surviving cancer to encourage her. More recently just before his death, Fitz wrote one of the most moving tributes I received when I was awarded the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize last year.

To us in Africa, Dr Fitzhugh Mullan has left a legacy of generosity, caring, relentless pursuit of social justice, equity and excellence. These are lessons that I commend to upcoming African health leaders in the AFREhealth community and beyond. We congratulate the George Washington University for honouring his memory by renaming the GW Health Workforce Institute which he co-founded in 2015 the Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity in April 2020. His illustrious contribution and legacy live on.