

Biography of Fitzhugh Seumas MacManus Mullan

Fitzhugh Seumas MacManus Mullan of Bethesda Maryland died peacefully at home on November 29, 2019. Dr. Mullan was an American physician, writer, educator, and social activist who has served on the faculty of the George Washington University since 1996 as a Professor of Health Policy and Management and Professor of Pediatrics. He helped to establish the GW Health Workforce Institute recently renamed the Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity. He was an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine.

Dr. Mullan's activism started during medical school in the 1960s when he spent time in Mississippi as a civil rights worker with the Medical Committee for Human Rights. He was a leader of the Student Health Organization during his time as a medical student, an organizer of the Lincoln Collective at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx while a pediatric resident, and the president of the Committee of Interns and Residents in New York City in 1971-1972. These events are captured in his memoir of the period, *White Coat, Clenched Fist: The Political Education of an American Physician*.

Dr. Mullan's father and grandfather were physicians. He grew up in New York City where he attended the Dalton School. He studied history at Harvard and obtained his medical degree from the University of Chicago. He joined the United States Public Health Service in 1972 and spent 3 years practicing medicine in a community clinic in New Mexico as one of the first members of the National Health Service Corps, a program of which he subsequently became director. He later returned to New Mexico to serve as Secretary of Health and Environment for Governor Toney Anaya, worked for Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, and led the Federal Bureau of Health Professions. He attained the rank of Assistant Surgeon General, and Rear Admiral, USPHS. In 1989, he published *Plagues and Politics: The Story of the United States Public Health Service*, a volume still used to orient new officers to the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS.

In 1996, Mullan retired from the US Public Health Service and worked as a writer/editor at *Health Affairs*, the health policy journal, where he founded the monthly column: "Narrative Matters". He believed that people's understanding of policy issues was often determined by experience and anecdote. No one disputed that data and evidence should be the standard for policy making, but Mullan contended that stories have always been powerful mediators of how we see the world. A policy journal should therefore provide space for personal narratives that carry policy messages. Mullan wrote the first one himself entitled "Me and the System" and subsequently edited a 2006 anthology, *Narrative Matters: The Power of the Personal Essay in Health Policy*.

During his time at Health Affairs, Dr. Mullan resumed practicing pediatrics at the Upper Cardozo Clinic of Unity Health Care and wrote about the experience in a series of pieces in *Health Affairs* and the Washington Post. In 2002, he published *Big Doctoring: Profiles in Primary Care*, a book of oral histories gathered from primary care physicians and nurse practitioners in an effort to capture the beauty and plight of those who provide the foundation of the health care system.

During his later years at the George Washington University, his research focused on health workforce and health equity. From 2008-2010, he led a Gates Foundation funded study of Sub-Saharan African Medical Schools and from 2010-2015, he directed the Coordinating Center for the Medical Education Partnership Initiative, a \$135 million US government investment in medical education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

His 2010 paper, “The Social Mission of Medical Education: Ranking the Schools”, caused controversy at some schools but helped establish social justice as an important topic in medical education. In 2012, he founded the Beyond Flexner Alliance, an interprofessional organization dedicated to promoting social mission in health professions education and served as the chair of the organization’s Board of Directors until 2018. He worked with Vanessa Kerry, physician and healthcare administrator to create SEED Global Health of which he served as the founding Board Chair, 2011-2012. With support from the Atlantic Philanthropies, Dr. Mullan was able to consolidate his work in health equity in the health professions by initiating the George Washington University-based Atlantic Fellows for Health Equity program.

In 1975, Dr. Mullan was diagnosed with a primary mediastinal seminoma, a cancer deep in his chest. During the next 3 years, he underwent multiple surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy, a difficult and uncertain course that he chronicled in the widely read book, *Vital Signs: A Young Doctor’s Struggle with Cancer*, published in 1983. That book and a subsequent New England Journal of Medicine article, “Seasons of Survival: Reflections of a Physician with Cancer,” formed the basis for the development of the cancer survivorship movement. Prior to that point, people with cancer were seen as “victims” and not as active participants in their care or in public policy.

In October of 1986, Dr. Mullan and survivor colleagues Cathy Logan and Edith Lennenberg, convened 25 people (survivors, cancer community organizers, and health professionals) in Albuquerque, NM to discuss creating a “cancer alumni association”. By the end of that weekend, they had formed the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS), a consumer group that for the last 30 years has provided a strong voice for cancer patients and their families, promoting and celebrating the idea of survivorship and pushing for sensible, patient-friendly public policy regarding cancer care. Mullan served as president and then chair of the NCCS Board of Directors from 1986-1993.

Dr. Mullan is survived by his wife, Irene Dankwa-Mullan, two daughters, Meghan Mullan of Bethesda, MD, and Caitlin Crain of San Rafael, CA, a step-daughter, Perpetua ‘Peppy’ Buadoo of Bethesda, MD, a son, Jason Mullan of Rockville, four grandchildren Nicolo, Leandro, Seamus and Lilia, his sister Mariquita ‘Quita’ Mullan of Gaithersburg, MD, a brother, Anthony Mullan of the District of Columbia and a half-brother Alex Cohen of Camden, ME.