

Louis W. Sullivan, M.D.

Recipient of the 2008 Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Award for Humanitarian Contributions to the Health of Humankind

As physician, educator, Civil Rights pioneer and shaper of public policy, Dr. Louis Wade Sullivan has fought all his professional life to improve public health in United States and around the world. He founded, and was the first president, of Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. From 1989 to 1993, he served as secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services under President George H.W. Bush. Today he is involved in several projects: developing the National Health Museum to improve the health literacy of Americans; overseeing the Sullivan Alliance, a Kellogg Foundation-funded initiative to increase diversity in the health professions and chairing the President's Advisory Council on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

"For more than forty years, Dr. Sullivan has worked to educate others in the public health field. His work has made a difference in our nation's healthcare systems and schools, but the greatest impact is among the students who learned from his example over the years," says former First Lady Barbara Bush.

"He is a widely respected and effective leader in civil

rights and is frequently sought after for his counsel in national health issues," according to Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Sullivan has had an illustrious career. He was born on November 3, 1933, in Atlanta. His early childhood was



spent in the little south Georgia town of Blakely. His father, Walter W. Sullivan, Sr., was a funeral director; his mother, Lubirda Priester Sullivan, an English teacher and school supervisor. He has an older brother, Walter.

"From the time I was about age 5, I had a role model," Dr. Sullivan remembers. "He was a physician, Dr. Joseph Griffin, in the nearby town of Bainbridge. He was the only black physician in a radius of 100 miles. I saw that Dr. Griffin was really doing something im-

portant and he was highly respected in the community."

When high school rolled around, the two Sullivan brothers moved back to Atlanta to live with friends and attend urban schools. "My folks were so heavily committed to education," Dr. Sullivan says. "My brother and I credit our parents with the success we have had—their courage, determination and the high goals they set for us."

Besides studying hard, Dr. Sullivan played trumpet in

the Booker T. Washington High School marching band. Walter played trombone.

In 1954, Dr. Sullivan graduated magna cum laude from Morehouse College. Four years later he graduated cum laude and third in his class from Boston University School of Medicine. He is certified in internal medicine and hematology.

While in medical school, he married Eva Williamson, known as Ginger. They eventually settled in Lexington, Massachusetts, where they raised their three children, Paul, Shanta and Halsted.

In 1960, Dr. Sullivan received a fellowship in pathology at Massachusetts General Hospital. A year later he moved to the Thorndike Memorial Research Laboratories at Harvard Medical School at Boston City Hospital for a fellowship in hematology.

Dr. Sullivan was an instructor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in 1963–64, and assistant professor of medicine at Seton Hall College of Medicine from 1964–1966. In 1966, he became co-director of hematology at Boston University Medical Center and, a year later, founded the Boston University Hematology Service at Boston City Hospital. Dr. Sullivan joined the Boston University School of Medicine in 1966 and remained until 1975, holding positions as assistant professor of medicine, associate professor of medicine, and professor of medicine.

“From his early days on, Dr. Sullivan has been a forward-thinking leader in the medical and health fields,” says Bernice Catherine Harper, a founding member of the board

of directors of the Foundation for Hospices in SubSaharan Africa (FHSSA).

In the early 1970s, Dr. Sullivan began meeting with other Morehouse alums to discuss the college’s plans to add a medical school. The group successfully lobbied the Georgia General Assembly and in 1975 Dr. Sullivan became the first dean and first president of the medical school, which opened its doors to students in 1978 with a two-year program. The medical college became independent in 1981 and four years later, sixteen students were awarded the school’s first four-year diplomas. “We started in a double-wide trailer,” Dr. Sullivan recalls.

Today the Morehouse School of Medicine “is a beacon of light and a bulwark on the hill, fostering and enhancing medical education not only for future physicians, but healers focused on health needs in resource-poor areas around the world,” says Ms. Harper. “This story is all the more remarkable because its founder returned to his native South, which had denied him medical training,

to create a world class institution. He had a vision that talented men and women were needed to serve the poor and care for the underserved and disadvantaged.”

For more than two decades, Dr. Sullivan served as President of Morehouse School of Medicine. But he did have one hiatus. In 1989 Sullivan became Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As HHS secretary, Dr. Sullivan led a public charge as part of the Healthy People 2000 Initiative to address the epidemic of obesity. He pushed for the most comprehensive food

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safety law in history, the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990. In addition, he took on the tobacco companies, despite their intensive lobbying efforts, to promote a smoke-free America.

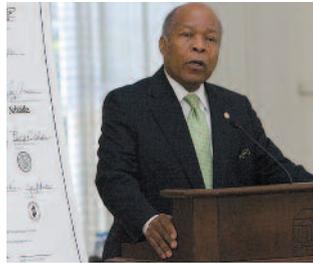
“He’s a first-class researcher,” Dr. James Melby of Boston University told the Boston Globe in 1990. “He was the first to show the minimum requirement for vitamin B-12 in man.” Sullivan also did pioneering work on alcoholism and its effect on the human blood-forming system.

Dr. Sullivan’s more recent efforts complement his earlier accomplishments in public health. In 1999, Dr. Sullivan endorsed needle exchange programs, as part of a larger HIV/AIDS prevention strategy. He pioneered new approaches in the treatment of sickle cell disease, an overlooked disorder that disproportionately affects African-Americans. As a result, he co-founded the Boston University Hematology Service and directed the Boston Sickle Cell Center.

As the founding President of the Association of Minority Health Professions Schools, Dr. Sullivan has advocated tirelessly for increasing racial and ethnic diversity within the nation’s healthcare workforce. For that reason, he chaired the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Health Care Workforce which culminated in the 2004 report: “Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions.” More recently, Dr. Sullivan joined with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to launch the Sullivan Alliance a major

initiative to build a more diverse cadre of health providers to better serve urban and low-income communities.

Holding more than 50 honorary degrees, Dr. Sullivan has served on numerous boards of directors related to international health, including Medical Education for South African Blacks, Africare, International Foundation for Self-



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Help and care. He has brought his considerable knowledge and commitment to FHSSA, acting as its spokesman during a critical time in advancing care for those with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“Medicine is not just a science,” Dr. Sullivan told the Boston Globe, “medicine is an art. You’re not just dealing with molecules in a laboratory. You’re dealing with people and their lives. So communication, sensitivity, understanding where people are, being able to get good compliance with you as an authority figure where people trust you. That, in a microcosm, is why black medical schools and, in a larger sense, why black institutions exist.”

Today Dr. Sullivan lives in Atlanta, not far from Morehouse. When he’s not working, he and Ginger take long walks. “I read,” he says, “I used to play tennis, but unfortunately a bad hip stopped that.” The couple also spends time at their house in Martha’s Vineyard and they see

their children when they can: Paul, who is married with two sons, is a radiologist in Dallas; Shanta is an actress in New York, and Halsted is a television writer in Los Angeles.

Dr. Sullivan still enjoys his work, he says. “because if you really enjoy it, it’s not really work.”