

Remembering Dr. Elizabeth Hillman, OC, MD, LLD, FAAP, FRCP

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Canadian Global Health Pediatrician with long ties to East Africa

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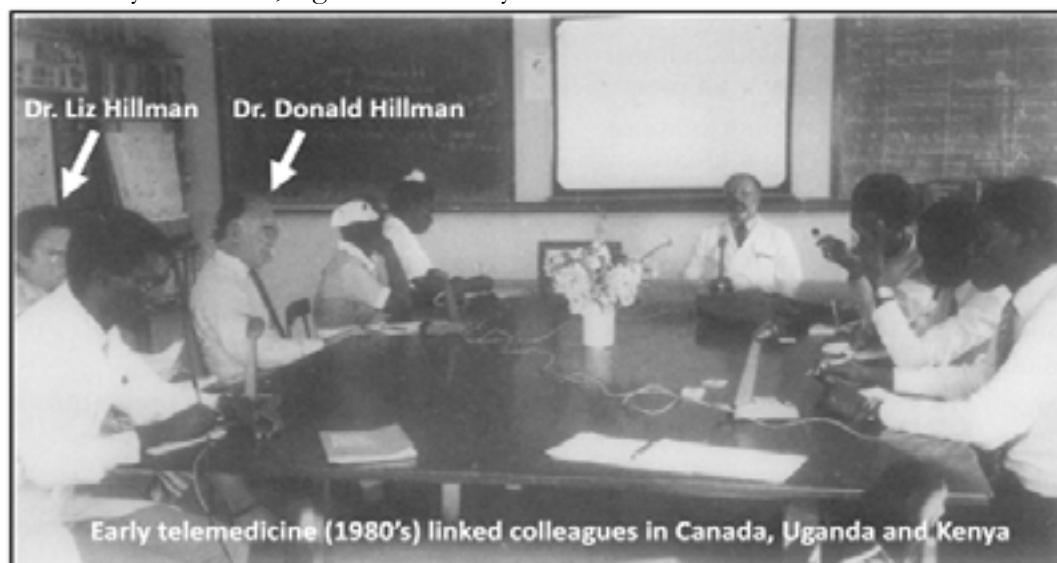
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It is with deep sadness that we mark the passing of Dr. Elizabeth (Liz) Hillman, the Canadian pediatrician who, along with husband Dr. Donald Hillman, devoted her professional life to caring for mothers and children and improving and expanding medical education on several continents. She was 92 years old.

Dr. Hillman's life is the story of hard work, dedication and caring. Born in Clinton, Ontario to parents who were school teachers, Liz never sat in a school building until she went to university. Her parents raised her and her siblings in a railroad car that served as their home and mobile schoolroom for the children of miners, trappers and railroad workers all across rural Canada. At age 8, she told her father she was going to be a doctor, and as her work as a physician later proved, she certainly inherited his love of teaching. She graduated from University of Western Ontario, received her MD degree in 1951 and received postgraduate training at UWO, McGill, Great Ormond Street in London, Harvard, and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. While in Boston, she met her husband Don; they married in 1955. Following several years in Canada, where Liz was the Director of the Ambulatory Department at the Montreal Children's Hospital, she and Don began pediatric work and teaching abroad as they would continue to do together for 51 years until Don's death in 2006.

With 5 children under the age of 13, the family moved to Nairobi in 1969, where she and Don worked for two years at the newly established medical school at the University of Nairobi, and the Kenyatta National Hospital of Kenya. They returned for two more years between 1974-76. McGill University and the Montreal Children's Hospital remained their base for 20 years, following which they moved to Newfoundland where Liz was Professor of Paediatrics at Memorial University and Director of Ambulatory Education at the Janeway Child Health Centre.

Their global health work and teaching continued in the 1970's and 80's when they worked with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) on numerous programs including the Child and Maternal Education Program in Uganda, child primary health care programs in Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda and Kenya, as well as medical education in Kenya and Uganda. They were even pioneers in the very early days of telemedicine, connecting learners and medical faculty in Canada, Uganda and Kenya.



Liz was also a pioneer in raising awareness among and providing education to North American physicians and medical students on many topics in what is now the field of global health. She was a very active member of the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and she was instrumental in the creation of the AAP Section on International Child Health (SOICH) in 1996, now renamed Section on Global Health (SOGH). In 1989, she received the CPS Alan Ross Award, and Liz (and Don posthumously) were the first recipients of the AAP award created in their honor in 2011, the Hillman-Olness Award, given annually for lifetime service and lasting contributions in global child health.

Her other lifetime awards were numerous and included the Royal College James H. Graham Award (1995), the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Canadian Society for International Health (2000) and an honorary Doctorate of Laws degree from Memorial University of Newfoundland (2004). They were awarded the Office of the Order of Canada (the “OC” after her name) in 1994.

Liz accomplished all this not only with intelligence and courage, but with humility, kindness and generosity to patients and colleagues above and beyond expectation. Her charm, easy going nature, ability to pivot and improvise whenever and wherever needed made her a pleasure to work with and a joy to know. Yet she could be tough when it came to fighting for child health, as when she fought against the Nestle company in the 1970s for promoting formula over breastfeeding. The hearings in the US Senate and discussions at WHO helped lead to important marketing reform.

Dr. Elizabeth Hillman inspired generations of doctors around the world to always do their best to improve child health locally and globally. She was able to live her final years and pass peacefully in the loving company of her caring family and friends in Canada. It is with profound gratitude that we say goodbye to Liz, our wonderful friend and colleague.

A brief but delightful first-person account of her life with advice for young doctors was published in Paediatrics & Child Health, Vol 16, No 2, February 2011. It can be found online here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3043034/>

Her obituary with remembrances can be found here: <http://www.carnells.com/?obituaries=elizabeth-hillman-oc-md-lld-faap-frcp-nee-slovan>

“My first message to younger colleagues is simple, nothing ever turns out as you expect, and you must enjoy every minute together as we did while we learned together and widened our vision of this strange, needy and wonderful world in which we live, where there is always more to be done and never enough time to do it all – which is why we must teach others...” --Liz Hillman, 2011



Liz at her beloved lake cottage in the Laurentian Mountains in Canada