

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### **Professor S.W.A. GUNN, MD, MS, FRCSC, FRCSI (Hon), DSc (Hon), dr. h. c. A 90<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE**



In February of this year Professor William Gunn of Geneva, Switzerland, celebrated a most remarkable 90<sup>th</sup> birthday jubilee. A highly respected Canadian surgeon who enjoys excellent mental and physical condition, and continues to perform the scientific and organizational work for which he has long been recognized throughout the world. A pioneer of medical emergency systems, Professor Gunn has contributed greatly to the emergence and evolution of Disaster Medicine, Humanitarian Medicine, and the expansion of surgical fields in developing and “third world” countries. He worked closely with officials for many countries and has continued this collaboration with Czech healthcare and medical educational institutions; most notably with Charles University in Prague and the J.E. Purkinje Czech Medical Association.

William Gunn was born on February 10, 1926, in British Cyprus, where his father was serving as

Chief Medical Officer of His Majesty's Military Hospital. William Gunn completed his medical studies in Geneva; his doctoral thesis dealt with the haemostatic effects of thrombin in brain surgery, initial experiments which eventually led to the development of the fibrin sealants that are commonly used in surgery today. However, since 1967, the majority of his professional career has been devoted to the World Health Organization (WHO), for which he has performed such roles as: Director of Emergency Humanitarian Operations; Cabinet Head for the Presidents of the World Health Assembly; Consultant for the Effects of Nuclear War on Health and Health Services; WHO Adviser to the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the European Union; Founding President of the WHO Medical Society; liaison for numerous universities; and a host of other esteemed positions.

Professor Gunn's laudable tenure with WHO has resulted in pioneering advancements in various fields, including a modern approach to eliminating or minimizing the public health impact of mass disasters and catastrophes; his educational programs have dramatically improved physician and other health care professionals' preparedness to provide medical assistance in extraordinary emergency conditions. Moreover, he created and persistently strove for the production of the WHO Emergency Health Kit to allow rapid response rescue work in mass casualty events. The contents of these kits are sufficient to provide 3 months of basic health care for 10,000 people, and they are stored in convenient locations throughout the world to ensure rapid dispatch to a given disaster site.

Professor Gunn has always applied his creative ingenuity in a most efficacious manner, implementing it with practical applications that continue to benefit globally operating organizations. In addition to founding both the European Centre for Disaster Medicine and the WHO Medical Society, he also co-founded the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM), the Asia-Pacific

Conferences on Disaster Medicine in Tokyo (APCDM), the Euro-Mediterranean Council for Burns and Fire Disasters (MBC), and has served as President of the International Federation of Surgical Colleges (IFSC). In 1984, he established and remains President of the International Association for Humanitarian Medicine (IAHM), which bears the name of Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of WHO. The predominant operating principle of this organization and, in fact, William Gunn's entire life's work, is the premise that health is a basic human right and serves as a bridge to peace.

Professor Gunn has authored or co-authored more than 300 professional publications and 20 monographs, among which, titles such as *Humanitarian Medicine* (2005), *Understanding the Global Dimensions of Health* (2005), and *Concepts and Practice of Humanitarian Medicine* (2008). Both editions of his *Dictionary of Disaster Medicine and Humanitarian Relief* (1990, 2013) are very well known and widely used in practice throughout the world, and have been translated into several languages, including Japanese and Chinese. Professor Gunn founded several highly reputable professional journals, for which he served as Senior Editor for many years, e.g. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (WADEM), *Annals of Burns and Fire Disasters* (MBC), *Disaster and Military Medicine*, and the *Journal of Humanitarian Medicine* (IAHM). He has also been a member of numerous other editorial boards, and presently serves as both an expert and consultant.

Due to his many years of interdisciplinary collaboration, Professor Gunn is very highly regarded in numerous national professional circles. His proactive advisory assistance provided the Czech Republic with significant incentive to construct a modern emergency medical services system after 1992, and to prepare and draft the healthcare sections of Acts No. 239/2000 Coll. (Integrated Rescue System) and No. 240/2000 Coll. (Crisis Management). His long-time collaboration with Burns Medicine practitioners at the Charles University 3<sup>rd</sup> Medical Faculty was fundamentally beneficial to the development of burn centers in Prague, Ostrava, Brno and Hradec Králové.

Professor Gunn's career of preeminent, meritorious service and his exceptional personal character have resulted in a long series of awards and formal recognition. Among these, it is worth noting that William Gunn is a Professor affiliated with 3 universities, and the recipient of the Cross and Ribbon of the Order of St. Agatha of San Marino, as well as

awards from the Royal Society of Medicine and UN Economic and Social Council of Europe, for his many contributions to humanitarian medicine. For introducing essential surgery in the primary healthcare systems of developing countries he was also awarded the first Special Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Professor Gunn holds honorary doctorates from several universities, learned societies, and medical associations; among which he was especially delighted to receive a doctorate honoris causa from Charles University in Prague (2004), and the Commemorative Medal of the J.E. Purkinje Czech Medical Association (2006). Professor Gunn is an honorary member of numerous professional societies around the world. Some examples here in our own country include the Czech Burns Society; the Czech Society of Military Physicians, Pharmacists and Veterinarians; and the J.E. Purkinje Czech Medical Association. In 2014, he received the renowned international A. Meneghetti Prize for his life-long contributions to science and humanism.

In addition to his commendable scientific work in the aforementioned fields, Professor Gunn possesses a true Renaissance Personality that is reflected in his love of history, culture, and the arts. He particularly enjoys the topics of medical theory and disease management from the time of medicine's earliest beginnings; so much so, in fact, that he was Lecturer in History of Medicine at the University of British Columbia Medical Faculty, Canada. Professor Gunn has also studied the life, art, and culture of the indigenous peoples of Canada's Northwest Coast to great depths. In return, he was awarded the respected title of Honorary Medicine Man, was inducted as Chief in 3 Tribes, and was given the totemic name of Kwekwala-gila (Savior of Spirits). His promotion of the art of Canada's First Nations from mere tribal artifacts to internationally recognized art was also a significant achievement. Furthermore, Gunn's publication *Totem Poles of British Columbia* has become a classic in the field of anthropology, which led to his acceptance as a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute. Professor Gunn is also an enthusiastic collector of classic literature, antiquarian books, and has compiled a valuable collection of historical maps. His appreciation for music is equally great, and he is especially fond of opera. It should be noted that, even when visiting Prague only briefly, the Professor always strives to find time to attend our operas.

Professor William Gunn is an extraordinary personality whose tremendous work and contributions have benefited the lives of thousands of vulnerable

*Klein: Prof. William Gunn's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday*

people around the world. An inspiration to his colleagues and successors; respecting and respected by all communities regardless of race, nationality, religion, culture or socioeconomic status; Professor Gunn is the quintessential international envoy of medi-

cine and true humanism. We wish him excellent health in the coming years; continued unwavering enthusiasm and energy in his pursuits; and many precious moments with his beloved wife Jean, 2 daughters, grandchildren, and countless friends around the world.

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