

Stephen Blount

The renowned public health specialist, who contributed to innumerable fights against infectious diseases, died on April 30, 2022.



Renowned public health specialist Stephen B Blount, who contributed substantially in the fight against infectious diseases such as malaria, lymphatic filariasis, and polio, died on April 30, 2022. Media reports, however, did not reveal the cause of his death.

In a statement dated May 23, 2022, The Carter Center's Chief Executive Officer Paige Alexander and the Vice President, Health Programs Kashef Ijaz mourned the unexpected death of Blount who had just retired on Feb 28, 2022, from the US-based not-for-profit organisation after an impressive career in global public health. The statement included a farewell note made by Blount on his retirement day from The Carter Center: there, he suggested the staff to "Go brave" while facing work-related challenges.

"I was fortunate to be blessed by Steve's wisdom, kindness, and joyful moments", commented Valery E Madsen Beau De Rochars (University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA), a consultant for The Carter Center, in Hispaniola. "[Steve] spoiled anyone working in his environment with his enthusiasm, unwavering commitment to social justice, and compassion", Madsen Beau De Rochars told *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*. "[He] was kind and compassionate and cared deeply about the people he worked with and the people he served", added Greg Noland (The Carter Center, Atlanta, GA, USA).

Noland said that Blount had a wonderful sense of humour and a sharp desire to take action in any situation. "[Also], he could speak hard truths with a calm voice and was respected across public health fields", he noted.

Born in 1953 in Detroit, MI, USA, Blount completed a Bachelor of Science in Psychology in 1975. In 1978, he received his medical degree from Tufts University (Boston, MA, USA). From the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI, USA), he earned the Master of Public Health in 1980.

Before initiating his work at The Carter Center in 2013, Blount served for more than two decades, starting in 1988, at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While finishing his career at the CDC in 2013, Blount was the CDC's associate director for global health development. However, from 1997 to 2005, he directed the CDC's Office of Global Health; and from 2005 to 2010, he directed the CDC's Coordinating Office of Global Health.

At the CDC, Blount's activities included supervision of the Global AIDS Program, global immunisation, disease eradication, and initiatives to control malaria and tuberculosis, among others. He also worked in CDC's polio initiative, and during that time the number of polio-endemic countries significantly reduced from 41 to four. He also served as a leader in the Global Measles Partnership that cut down the global mortality from measles by 39%.

Blount led The Carter Center's Hispaniola initiative that aimed at eliminating malaria and lymphatic filariasis from Dominican Republic and Haiti. In this sense, Noland commented that "The island [of Hispaniola] is the last reservoir of [malaria and lymphatic filariasis] in the region. Other countries had eliminated these diseases; [so] Haiti and the Dominican Republic could do it, too".

However, at The Carter Center, Blount was also involved in the public health training initiative, in which health-care workers in developing countries were provided training in maternal and child health.

Madsen Beau De Rochars recalled that Blount always thought about people in need. According to him, Blount helped people as per their needs and gave them vital advice. "And he did the same at the level of public health where he thought, when considering his contribution in the elimination of malaria in Hispaniola, that the elimination of malaria will have a positive impact on the economy through tourism", he added.

Blount worked as a mentor of several public health specialists at CDC and The Carter Center. He was fond of jazz music; and he used to practice mindfulness. The Carter Center statement praised his modesty, clear thinking, and gentleness.

Commenting on Blount, Paul Weiss (Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA) told *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*: "Although I did not work directly with Dr Blount, I have worked very closely with his team. Under his stewardship they found great latitude in thinking outside the box to solve public health problems". "Steve's vision, his ability to see the people behind the numbers, made it possible for us to achieve wonderful things under his guidance", he added.

In 2007, Blount was given the Presidential Meritorious Rank Award by the US Government for his skilful services, according to a May 11, 2022, report by *The Detroit News*. He is survived by his wife, children, siblings, and grandchildren.

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Stephen Blount - Carter Center