

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

OBITUARY

**Prof. WILLIAM GUNN, MD, MS, FRCSC, FRCSI (Hon), DSC (Hon), dr.h.c.
(10. 2. 1926 - 1. 11. 2022)**



Professor Sisvan William Aram **Gunn**, a world-renowned authority on disaster medicine, a pioneer in the field of emergency medical systems and humanitarian medicine, a researcher, organiser and close associate of the representatives of Czechoslovak and Czech health care, died at the age of 96 in Switzerland, on November 1st, 2022. We have thoroughly featured the Professor's life and extensive work achievements on his ninetieth birthday (*MMSL*, 85,2016, (1), 44-46). This brief obituary will recount just a few of his legacy's most prominent facets.

William Gunn studied medicine in Geneva and spent most of his professional career also there. He worked for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in various capacities, inter alia, as Director of Emergency Humanitarian Operations, as President of the WHO Medical Society, and as a WHO advisor to the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, the EU and others. Professor Gunn became a pioneer of modern approaches to the medical response to mass disasters and catastrophes. He developed a method and initiated the production of the WHO Emergency Health Kit containing medical and other supplies to cover the needs of 10,000 people for three months following a mass disaster anywhere in the world. He established the scientific foundations of disaster medicine methodology. Professor Gunn has authored or co-authored more than 300 peer-reviewed publications and 20 monographs on disaster and humanitarian medicine. Some of them have been translated into several world languages, including Japanese and Chinese.

Professor Gunn belonged to the founding members of the International Association for Humanitarian Medicine Brock Chisholm, an organisation bearing also his name since 2016 (IAHM Chisholm - Gunn), and served as its first president. For several years, he presided over the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine, served as Honorary Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Conference on Disaster Medicine, and was the founding President

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of the International Association of Trainers for UN Millennium Development Goals. He co-founded and served as President of the Mediterranean Council for Burns and Fire Disasters for many years. He was editor, co-editor or member of editorial boards of many professional journals, including *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (WADDEM), *Annals of Burns and Fire Disasters* (MBC), and *Journal of Humanitarian Medicine* (IAHM). Last but not least, we should mention his active membership on the editorial board of our journal *Acta Chirurgiae Plasticae*, which lasted for more than ten years.

Professor Gunn became well-known in our professional circles as he actively collaborated with the prominent members of our medical profession, such as Prof. J. Blahoš, MD, DrSc., long-time chairman of the Czech Medical Association of J.E. Purkinje, Prof. Jiří Pokorný, MD, DrSc., Prof. R. Königová, MD, CSc., Assoc. Prof. L. Klein, MD, CSc., Prof. J. Fusek, MD, DrSc. from Hradec Králové, just to name a few. As a consultant and advisor, he was instrumental in creating a modern medical emergency service in the Czech Republic after 1992. Moreover, he significantly contributed to drafting the medical parts of Acts No. 239/2000 Coll., on the Integrated Rescue System, and No. 240/2000 Coll., on Emergency Management. It is worth mentioning that William Gunn facilitated with great understanding establishing new professional contacts after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain in Europe and invited our young physicians to participate in conferences and congresses in the then inaccessible “Western” world. He was responsible for getting our libraries free copies of the professional journals where he was a member of the editorial boards. His long-standing cooperation with Charles University Prague, the 3rd Faculty of Medicine, especially with the Department of Burns Medicine, and his academic activities in the field of humanitarian and disaster medicine were recognised by awarding him an honorary doctorate of Charles University (2004). Moreover, Professor Gunn received the Commemorative Gold Medal of the Czech Medical Association of J. E. Purkinje (2006) and was an honorary member of the Czech Society of Burns Medicine and the Society of Military Medicine (formerly Society of Military Physicians, Pharmacists and Veterinarians) of the Czech Medical Association of J. E. Purkinje.

Professor William Gunn was an outstanding figure and an internationally respected professional authority. He belonged to the leading medical representatives in international organisations and promoted humanism, especially in disaster medicine, and human rights, including the right to health. He was instrumental in creating the conditions for delivering primary surgical care in developing countries by introducing the principle of “essential surgery”. Professor Gunn successfully dedicated his professional life to the interactions between human rights, humanist societal structures, disaster management, global health, basic surgical needs and sustainable developmental outreach to emerging societies. A highly educated, experienced and respected physician has passed away - a man of humble demeanour, empathic and friendly, who succeeded in upholding the principles of humanism and uniting people regardless of their race, nationality, religion, culture and socio-economic status.

May his memory live forever!

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