

OBITUARY - DR WILLARD CATES JR

The world has lost one of its champions of public health and a pioneer researcher in the fields of HIV/AIDS and women's reproductive health as Dr. Willard Cates, Jr. 73, passed away peacefully on March 17, 2016, surrounded by his loving family. A husband, father, grandfather, educator, and mentor to many in the field of family health, Ward was preceded in death by his father, Willard Cates, his mother, Dorothy Sands Cates, and his sister, Margot Cates Kagen. He is survived by his wife and the love of his life, Joan Roberts Cates; two daughters, Deborah Cates Knighton (Tim) and Sarah Cates Parker (Andy); and four grandchildren, Charles Watts Knighton, Henry Sands Knighton, Katherine Elizabeth Parker, and Addison Margaret Parker.

Ward was born in Cleveland, Ohio on November 16, 1942 and grew up in Rye, New York. He graduated from Rye High School in 1960 and Yale University in 1964 with a Bachelor's degree in History. After graduation, Ward traveled to England to further his studies during a fellowship at Kings' College at Cambridge University. While in England, Ward experienced two unexpected events that shaped the trajectory of his life. First, he met his future wife, Joan, and pursued her throughout the capital cities of Europe. And secondly, Ward was injured during a rugby game, which subsequently sparked his interest and lifetime passion in medicine and public health. Shortly thereafter, Ward returned to Yale University where he was the first to complete a combined M.D./Masters in Public Health degree in 1971. After a stint in the United States Army where Ward achieved the rank of captain, he began a two year fellowship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the Epidemic Intelligence Service, a fellowship that helped to launch his long and storied career in reproductive and public health.

Ward began his fellowship shortly after the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision and became engrossed in the field of women's reproductive health. He served as the first permanent Chief of the Abortion Surveillance Branch at the CDC where he quickly emerged as the world's leading abortion epidemiologist. After nine years in the Family Planning Evaluation Division of the Abortion Surveillance Branch, Ward became the Director of the Division of Sexually Transmitted Diseases at CDC, a position Ward took at the dawn of the HIV epidemic in the United States. Working on the Kaposi Sarcoma/Oppportunistic Infections Task Force proved challenging yet rewarding for Ward who became an HIV/AIDS expert. This experience helped to shift his career path as he became interested in the international epidemic.

In 1994, Ward was recruited to work as a researcher at Family Health International (now FHI 360), a leading global development organization. Ward was the President/CEO of its Institute for Family Health and was serving as the President Emeritus of Research at the time of his death. During his time at FHI 360, Ward worked as principal investigator on many microbicide trials including the CAPRISA 004 trial of 1% tenofovir gel, a trial which showed a 39% reduction in HIV acquisition among women using the gel. From 1997-2002, Ward was a scientific investigator for the HIV Prevention Trials Network and was a principal investigator for the Microbicide Trials Network. He was a member of the Institute of Medicine.

A renowned leader and mentor, Ward has inspired two generations of leading scientists, public health officials, and clinical practitioners and provided much guidance for those in the fields of family planning, STD/HIV prevention, and epidemiology. Perhaps the best documentation of his leadership is his co-authorship of eight editions of Contraceptive Technology, widely regarded as the standard textbook in family planning. Ward was also a regular speaker at the twice-yearly Contraceptive Technology conferences and he co-edited two supplements on family planning and HIV for the journal AIDS.

As accomplished as he has been in his professional life, Ward found his greatest joy from his family. Known as Bumpa by his grandchildren, he loved hearing about and following the interests of his children and grandchildren. Whether on the sidelines watching his family excel on the fields or on the comfort of his couch while following Duke basketball, the L.A. Dodgers or Red Zone, Ward was always the loudest fan cheering for the things he loved.

A private interment will be held at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. A celebration of Ward's life will be held later in the spring. In Ward's memory, contributions would be much appreciated to The Guttmacher Institute, 125 Maiden Lane, 7th floor, New York, NY 10038, Guttmacher.org.