April 28, 2021

**Statement of Thanks to the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health Department of Epidemiology for naming an award for Bill Jenkins**

**SLIDE**

My family is deeply grateful for this tribute that acknowledges Bill Jenkins’ contributions to public health. We’d like to share a few facts about Bill with you.

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In 1970 as a young officer in the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and a first time attendee of the annual conference of the American Statistical Association Bill sat in on a session on minority health. All the presenters were white and so was the audience except for himself and one young black man. After the session Bill and his fellow black biostatistician discussed the need for self-determination—that Black people should always be at the table in conducting studies of their health. As a result of that experience Bill nutured a vision of creating a cadre of independent African American researchers and leaders who defined what to study to create health for people of color. He never wavered from that vision.

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In the 1980’s while at CDC he created Project Imohtep which expanded to become the Public Health Sciences Institute of Morehouse College. These programs were a national pipeline, designed to prepare undergraduates for the rigors of graduate programs in epidemiology and biostatistics. In 1991 he took a leave of absence from CDC to develop the Masters of Public Health program at the Morehouse School of Medicine, the first nationally accredited graduate program at an Historically Black College and University. After that he supported the establishment of public health graduate programs in HBCU’s throughout the nation. Bill contributed directly to the attainment of masters and doctorate degrees by over 700 people of color.

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As part of Bill’s vision of self-determination in public health research and leadership he created the Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues, fondly known as SAAPHI, it is an affiliate of the American Public Health Association. He also insisted on the need to study racism as an important etiologic factor in health disparities. Today, most of us think, well duh-huh, isn’t it obvious that racism is a cause of health inequity? But 30 years ago when Bill lead the first American College of Epidemiology meeting on Race and Racism people were shocked at the use of the word racism.

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Finally, Bill is known nationally for his efforts in the late 1960’s as that young federal worker who tried to end the Tuskegee Study of Syphilis in the Negro Male.

When the Tuskegee study was terminated around 1973 congress mandated a program to provide comprehensive lifetime medical and health benefits to the study participants and their families. In 1995, almost 25 years after his whistleblower attempt, Bill became the Director of CDC’s Tuskegee Health Benefits Program.

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He worked diligently to bring about President Clinton’s apology for the study.

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Bill never considered the study participants to be victims even though they were victimized. For him they were heroes-men of grace- who stood up to their adversity and whose sacrifice sparked an ethics revolution in the conduct of medical research in the US.

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Once again please accept my family’s sincere appreciation for your thoughtful tribute to the legacy of Bill Jenkins.