



CELEBRATING BLACK CANADIANS IN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH



A Conversation with Winston Miller, CPHI(C) Retired

Why did you pursue a career in public health? My journey began in my senior year of high school in Jamaica. I attended a career day event to hear the medical officer of health speak and was intrigued about the impact of public health programs. I enrolled in West Indies School of Public Health where I received top student honours. Following graduation, I worked as a PHI in rural and urban settings in Jamaica.

As a young man I had the opportunity to visit family who lived in Canada and fell in love with the country and after returning home I returned on a student visa and enrolled in the public health inspection program at Ryerson. My intent was to return to the Caribbean to continue my public health career and hopefully some day teach public health. However, after my time at Ryerson; my field training placement at Hastings Prince Edward Health Unit in Ontario; I received my CIPHI certification, and obtaining full time employment at the Haldimand Norfolk Health unit I knew my future was in Canada.

I joined Toronto Public Health (TPH) in 1973 and joined the CDC Division as their tropical disease specialist. After a period, I moved over to the Food and Sanitation Division where I held the positions of Senior Inspector, prosecutor, and acting area manager. I worked for TPH for 26 years. In 1994 I left to become the City of York Director of Public Health Inspection and then was promoted to an additional role as the City of York Health Unit's Chief Administration Officer. Served as board member, and President of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA). When the six former cities in Metro Toronto amalgamated, I became a Policy Analyst for the Ontario Ministry of Health with my prime focus on the development of new mandatory public health program standards. I finished my career employed by an International NGO as Director of international programs and managed several projects in 29 countries. I was able to utilize my public health background working with rural and urban NGOs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

What work during your career is the one that still stands out for you today? When I worked for TPH the CDC and Food & Sanitation Divisions amalgamated so I took the lead on setting up the department's Infection Control program including disease outbreak management. One of my responsibilities was to establish a liaison with all the city's hospitals. It was exciting investigative work and I recall there were incidences when we had to go to court and defend our public health science-based decisions.

Do you have any advice for students pursuing a career in public health?

- Not to limit your horizons.
- The EPH knowledge, and principles you gain through education and in the field is applicable to so many areas of public health and wellness in general.
- Recognize that your education is not just book knowledge and that everyone you meet will be part of your lifelong learning.
- The EPH field is very rewarding intellectually and provides satisfying lifelong opportunities.

What volunteer service have you been involved with during your career and in retirement?

- I always wanted to do volunteer work with international development agencies so during my career I would use my vacation time to volunteer for various NGOs with a focus on safe water and sanitation.
- Talking Book Library (TBL) that specializes in producing audio books in the DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) format for people who are not able to read standard print. The TBL collaborate with the CNIB. Their dedicated team of volunteers have produced over 2,500 inspiring books in an accessible format available at no cost to the users.
- Effect Hope is a Canadian Christian global health organization that partners with others to bring hope and restoration to people affected by neglected tropic diseases like Leprosy mission in Canada which has expanded neglected tropical diseases. These diseases cause illness and disabilities, perpetuate poverty, invite discrimination, and eliminate hope.
- Markham African Canadian Caribbean Association is a small non profit in York Region, Ontario that works with youth risk and partner with policy, CSA, public & catholic education boards.
- York Region Alliance of African Canadian Communities – Mentorship programs for Black youth.
- York Region Public Health Covid Vaccine Task Force member, advisory group for the Medical Officer of Health.
- Very active in church leadership.

Have you been honoured with any awards for your volunteer service?

- Markham African-Caribbean Canadian Association Person of the Year.
- Several volunteer service acknowledgements during my career and in retirement.
- OPHA Life Membership.