

Homage to Dexter Shurney (1958-2025)

By Ron Goetzel, President and CEO of The Health Project
On behalf of The Health Project Board of Directors

We all mourn the all too early passing of Dexter Shurney, MD. I had known Dexter for so many years. We served together on boards, advisory committees, panels, and joint research projects. Whenever we would meet, he'd reach out his hand and beam his broad smile. He always asked me how I was doing and sincerely wanted to know.

When I saw Dexter at a HERO meeting in 2018, right after my heart attack experienced while running through a foreign airport to catch a connecting flight, I told him what had happened. His expression immediately changed from delight in seeing me to one of deep concern. He wanted to know all the details. He then left me with some excellent words of advice, "don't run when you're under stress – you'll get to your destination no matter what – take it slow – your heart will appreciate it." It was obvious yet reassuring advice. I'll never forget it.

I tell this anecdote to underscore Dexter's humanity. He genuinely cared about people. On top of that, he was brilliant, strategic in his thinking, kind, and giving – a true mensch.

Facts about Dexter. As a physician, he led Blue Zones research initiatives and scientific partnerships. He was a population health innovator, board certified in Preventive Medicine, Public Health, and Lifestyle Medicine. He was the former Chief Medical Officer of Adventist Health, the President of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, faculty at Vanderbilt University, and Chief Medical Director/Executive Director of Global Health and Wellness at Cummins, Inc.

It was in his role at Cummins that I first got to know Dexter. Dexter believed that a corporate on-site health clinic should look and feel like a modern luxury hotel with an open design and welcoming reception desk. Dexter succeeded on all fronts – not only did the facility look good, it was perceived by employees as a high-quality medical clinic that not only addressed workplace injuries, it also provided primary care for chronic health conditions.

During his tenure at Vanderbilt, Dexter held joint faculty appointments as Assistant Clinical Professor, Division of Internal Medicine and Public Health, and Adjunct Faculty, Owens Graduate School of Management. For a number of years, he served as the Chief Medical Officer for Healthways. It was at that time that he was appointed by Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen to Chair the Tennessee Diabetes Prevention and Health Improvement Board. He was also the former Chief Medical Officer and Vice President of Medical Affairs for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, and Chair of the Business Strategies Committee for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP). Dexter authored the book "Integrating Wellness into Your Disease Management Programs," a "how-to" guide for employers dealing with chronic condition management.

Earlier in his life, Dexter attended Loma Linda University for his undergraduate training and Howard University College of Medicine where he received his degree in medicine. He also received a master's degrees in business and public health from the University of Detroit/Mercy and the Medical College of Wisconsin, respectively.

Lots more can be said about Dexter. In short, Dexter was a brilliant doctor who pushed the boundaries of prevention, population health, and lifestyle medicine. He shared his vision of a world where health is not just the absence of disease, but a path to a meaningful life accessible to everyone. More than that, he was a humble, graceful, and thoughtful man who treated everyone from global leaders to patients with dignity and kindness.

In memory of Dexter, HERO, the Ardmore Institute of Health, Blue Zones, and Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation established The Dexter Shurney, MD Well-being Fellowship by HERO, a new endowed research fellowship dedicated to integrity, healthy lifestyle, and equity. Here is the link to the endowment, [Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation HERO Dexter Shurney Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation - Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation](#).

We all miss Dexter and honor his life-long dedication to integrity, ethical practice, and overall humanity.