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# Paul Farmer

**Paul Edward Farmer** (October 26, 1959 – February 21, 2022) was an American medical anthropologist and physician. Farmer held an MD and PhD from Harvard University, where he was the Kolokotronis University Professor and the chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. He was the co-founder and chief strategist of Partners In Health (PIH), an international non-profit organization that since 1987 has provided direct health care services and undertaken research and advocacy activities on behalf of those who are sick and living in poverty. He was professor of medicine and chief of the Division of Global Health Equity at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Farmer and his colleagues in the U.S. and abroad pioneered novel community-based treatment strategies that demonstrate the delivery of high-quality health care in resource-poor settings in the U.S. and abroad. Their work is documented in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, *The Lancet*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, the *British Medical Journal*, and *Social Science and Medicine*.

Farmer wrote extensively on health and human rights, the role of social inequalities in the distribution and outcome of infectious diseases, and global health.

He was known as "the man who would cure the world", as described in the book *Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder. Paul Farmer & Partners in Health received the Peace Abbey Foundation Courage of Conscience Award in 2007 for saving lives by providing free health care to people in the world's poorest communities and working to improve health care systems globally. The story of Partners In Health is also told in the 2017 documentary *Bending the Arc*. He was a proponent of liberation theology.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

On April 24, 2021, Dr. Farmer was named Aurora Humanitarian, in recognition of his work with PIH.

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Farmer in 2011

<b>Born</b>	Paul Edward Farmer October 26, 1959 North Adams, Massachusetts, U.S.
<b>Died</b>	February 21, 2022 (aged 62) Butaro, Rwanda
<b>Education</b>	Duke University (BA) Harvard University (MD, PhD)
<b>Awards</b>	Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize MacArthur Genius Grant Public Welfare Medal Heinz Award in the Human Condition Berggruen Prize
<b>Scientific career</b>	
<b>Fields</b>	Internal medicine Infectious disease

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Medical anthropology

**Institutions** Harvard University

**Website** pih.org (<https://pih.org/>)  
ghsm.hms.harvard.edu/person/faculty/paul-farmer (<http://ghsm.hms.harvard.edu/person/faculty/paul-farmer>)  
www.lessonsfromhaiti.org (<http://www.lessonsfromhaiti.org/>)

## Early life and education

Farmer was born in North Adams, Massachusetts, and raised in Weeki Wachee, Florida. He was the brother of former professional wrestler Jeff Farmer. He was a graduate of Hernando High School in Brooksville, Florida, where he was elected president of his senior class.<sup>[3]</sup> He attended Duke University as a Benjamin N. Duke Scholar,<sup>[4]</sup> graduating *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts in medical anthropology in 1982.<sup>[3][5]</sup> After graduating from Duke, he began volunteering at a hospital in Cange, Haiti.<sup>[6]</sup> Subsequently, he attended Harvard University, earning an MD and a PhD in medical anthropology in 1990,<sup>[5]</sup> returning to Haiti multiple times during medical school to continue his work in Cange.<sup>[6]</sup> He completed an internal medicine residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital in 1993 and an infectious disease fellowship in 1996.<sup>[7]</sup> Farmer was board certified in internal medicine and infectious disease.<sup>[7]</sup>

## International work

In 1987, Farmer, along with Jim Yong Kim, Ophelia Dahl, Thomas J. White and Todd McCormack, co-founded Partners In Health.<sup>[8]</sup> PIH began in Cange in the Central Plateau of Haiti and at the time of Farmer's death in February 2022 operated 16 sites across the country, with approximately 7,000 employees.<sup>[6]</sup> Hôpital Universitaire de Mirebalais opened in 2013 and provides tertiary care to patients, including oncology and trauma surgery services.<sup>[6][8]</sup> Partners In Health also works in Rwanda, Lesotho, Malawi, Mexico, Peru, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Russia, and the Navajo Nation. The University of Global Health Equity is an initiative of Partners In Health that started in 2015 and focused on delivering the highest quality of health care by addressing the critical social and systemic forces causing inequities and inefficiencies in health care delivery.<sup>[9]</sup>

In 2003, the author Tracy Kidder wrote *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, which describes Farmer's work in Haiti, Peru, and Russia.<sup>[10]</sup>

In May 2009, Farmer was named Chair of Harvard Medical School's Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, succeeding Jim Yong Kim, his longtime friend and colleague. On December



Farmer (right), 2013

17, 2010, Harvard University's President, Drew Gilpin Faust, and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, named Farmer as a University Professor, the highest honor that the University can bestow on one of its faculty members.<sup>[11]</sup>

In August 2009, Farmer was named United Nations Deputy Special Envoy to Haiti (serving under former U.S. President Bill Clinton), in his capacity as Special Envoy.<sup>[12]</sup>

In December 2012, Farmer was appointed the United Nations Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Community Based Medicine and Lessons from Haiti.<sup>[13]</sup>

Farmer was editor-in-chief of *Health and Human Rights Journal*. He was on the board of the Aristide Foundation for Democracy and was a co-founder and board member of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti.<sup>[14]</sup> He was on the Board of PIVOT, a recently formed healthcare and research organization operating in Madagascar. He was a member of the Advisory Board of Incentives for Global Health, the NGO focused on developing the Health Impact Fund. He also served on the Global Advisory Council of GlobeMed, a student-driven global health organization that works through a partnership model.<sup>[15]</sup> Farmer also served on the Advisory Board of Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, an international student-driven advocacy organization that works on issues of medicine development and affordability.<sup>[16]</sup> Farmer was a board member of Kageno Worldwide, Inc., a community development agency that has worked in Kenya and Rwanda. He was also on the Board of Trustees for EqualHealth, which builds critical consciousness towards health equity.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Personal life and death

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Farmer was married to Didi Bertrand Farmer, a Haitian medical anthropologist and community health specialist who has led several initiatives at Partners in Health. Her most recent work focuses on empowering girls and young women in Haiti and Rwanda.<sup>[18]</sup> They had three children.<sup>[19]</sup>

In February 2022, Farmer was one of 38 Harvard faculty to sign a letter to *The Harvard Crimson* defending Professor John Comaroff, who had been found to have violated the university's sexual and professional conduct policies.<sup>[20]</sup> After students filed a lawsuit with detailed allegations of Comaroff's actions and the university's failure to respond, Farmer was one of several signatories to say that he wished to retract his signature.<sup>[21][22]</sup>

Farmer died in his sleep from an acute cardiac event in Butaro, Rwanda, on February 21, 2022, at the age of 62.<sup>[6][23]</sup> Farmer had been involved in medical education at Butaro District Hospital and the Butaro campus of the University of Global Health Equity, which accepted its first class of medical students in 2019.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Books

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- *Fevers, Feuds, and Diamonds: Ebola and the Ravages of History*. Paul Farmer. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. ISBN 978-0-374-23432-4 Farmer first visited the Western African Ebola virus epidemic site in July 2014, and he devotes much of the book to his personal experiences. Reviewing the outbreak in 2020, he noted that there were almost no Ebola deaths in the U.S. or Europe. By Farmer's account, the West Africa Ebola death toll arose from the longstanding failure to invest in basic health infrastructure which resulted in a lack of proper medical care. Looking at the history of West Africa, Farmer blames the almost

five centuries of European rule that resulted in the "rapacious extraction — of rubber latex, timber, minerals, gold, diamonds and human chattel" for the country's inability to provide adequate health care.<sup>[25]</sup>

- *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 1993, 2006 edition: [ISBN 978-0-520-08343-1](#)
- *The Uses of Haiti*, Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994, 2003, 2005 edition: [ISBN 978-1-56751-242-7](#)
- *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, revised 2001 edition: [ISBN 978-0-520-22913-6](#)
- *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 2005 edition: [ISBN 978-0-520-24326-2](#)
- *Global Health in Times of Violence*, co-edited with Barbara Rylko-Bauer and Linda Whiteford, School for Advanced Research Press, 2009 edition: [ISBN 978-1-934691-14-4](#)
- *Women, Poverty & AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Structural Violence (Series in Health and Social Justice)*, with coauthor Margaret Connors, Common Courage Press; Reprint edition (September 1996), [ISBN 978-1-56751-074-4](#)
- *Partner to the Poor: A Paul Farmer Reader*. Ed. Haun Saussy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, [ISBN 978-0-520-25713-9](#)
- *Haiti After the Earthquake*, Ed. Abbey Gardner and Cassia van der Hoof Holstein. [PublicAffairs](#), July 12, 2011, [ISBN 978-1-58648-973-1](#)
- *To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*. Ed. Jonathan Weigel. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. [ISBN 978-0-520-27597-3](#)
- *In the Company of the Poor: conversations between Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez*. Ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block. Orbis Books, 2013: [ISBN 978-1-62698-050-1](#)
- *Reimagining Global Health*. Paul Farmer, [Jim Yong Kim](#), Arthur Kleinman, and Matthew Basilio. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. [ISBN 978-0-520-27199-9](#)

## Awards and recognition

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Farmer was the recipient of numerous honors, including the [Bronislaw Malinowski Award](#) and the [Margaret Mead Award](#) from the [Society for Applied Anthropology](#), the [Outstanding International Physician \(Nathan Davis\) Award](#) from the [American Medical Association](#), a [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship](#), and, with his [Partners In Health](#) colleagues, the [Hilton Humanitarian Prize](#). He was a member of the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) and the [Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences](#), from which he was awarded the [2018 Public Welfare Medal](#). In 2020, he was awarded the million-dollar [Berggruen Prize](#).<sup>[26][27][28]</sup>

- 1993: [MacArthur Fellowship](#)<sup>[29][30]</sup>
- 1999: [Margaret Mead Award](#), [American Anthropological Association](#) and [Society for Applied Anthropology](#), for "Infections and Inequalities"<sup>[31]</sup>
- 2002: [Outstanding International Physician Award \(Nathan Davis Award\)](#), [American Medical Association](#)<sup>[32]</sup>
- 2005: [Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize](#) (awarded to [Partners In Health](#))<sup>[33]</sup>
- 2005: [Rudolf Virchow Award](#), [Professional Prize](#) (with [Dr. Arachu Castro](#)), [Society for Medical Anthropology](#)<sup>[34]</sup>

- 2006: Union Medal, Union Theological Seminary<sup>[35]</sup>
- 2006: Honorary Doctor of Laws, Princeton University<sup>[36]</sup>
- 2007: Honorary Doctor of Science, Emory University<sup>[37]</sup>
- 2007: The Peace Abbey Foundation Courage of Conscience Award
- 2009: Recipient of the Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement presented by Awards Council member Archbishop Desmond Tutu at an awards ceremony at St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa<sup>[38][39]</sup>
- 2009: Honorary Doctor of Letters, Columbia University<sup>[40]</sup>
- 2010: Honorary Doctor of Science, University of Pennsylvania<sup>[41]</sup>
- 2010: S. Roger Horchow Award for Greatest Public Service by a Private Citizen, an award given out annually by Jefferson Awards<sup>[42]</sup>
- 2011: named by *Foreign Policy* magazine to its list of top global thinkers<sup>[43]</sup>
- 2011: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, University of South Florida<sup>[44]</sup>
- 2011: Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, Georgetown University<sup>[45]</sup>
- 2012: Honorary Doctor of Science, Northwestern University<sup>[46]</sup>
- 2013: Honorary Doctor of Science, American University<sup>[47]</sup>
- 2013: Sword of Loyola, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine<sup>[48]</sup>
- 2015: *Blessed are the Peacemakers* Award, Catholic Theological Union<sup>[49]</sup>
- 2015: Forbes 400 Lifetime Achievement Award For Social Entrepreneurship<sup>[50]</sup>
- 2016: Bronislaw Malinowski Award, Society for Applied Anthropology<sup>[51]</sup>
- 2018: Public Welfare Medal, National Academy of Sciences<sup>[52]</sup>
- 2018: Elected to the American Philosophical Society<sup>[53]</sup>
- 2019: Honorary Doctor of Laws, McGill University<sup>[54]</sup>
- 2019: Gold Medal for Distinguished Service to Humanity, The National Institute of Social Sciences<sup>[55]</sup>
- 2020: Recipient of the million dollar Berggruen Prize for Philosophy and Culture<sup>[56]</sup>
- 2021: Aurora Humanitarian, in recognition of his work with PIH
- 2022: Inamori Ethics Prize<sup>[57][58][59]</sup>

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## External links

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- "Paul Edward Farmer, MD, PhD" (<https://ghsm.hms.harvard.edu/faculty-staff/paul-edward-farmer>). Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School.
  - [Appearances](https://www.c-span.org/person/?1007910) (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?1007910>) on [C-SPAN](#)
  - [Appearances](https://www.democracynow.org/appearances/paul_farmer) ([https://www.democracynow.org/appearances/paul\\_farmer](https://www.democracynow.org/appearances/paul_farmer)) on [Democracy Now!](#)
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