

Fallen Hero

Cornell Scott,
Hill Health Center

Cornell Scott, 1935-2008

Visionary shaped community health-center network

Long before health care was officially “in crisis,” Cornell (Scotty) Scott saw that many in New Haven weren’t being served by the traditional system. Low-income people, immigrants and the uninsured found it difficult to see a doctor and even more difficult to pay the bills.

By the time Scott died this summer at age 73, he was recognized as key to the establishment of the state’s network of community health centers, which serves as a national model of affordable,

comprehensive care. Scott was also a recognized national leader in the community health-center movement.

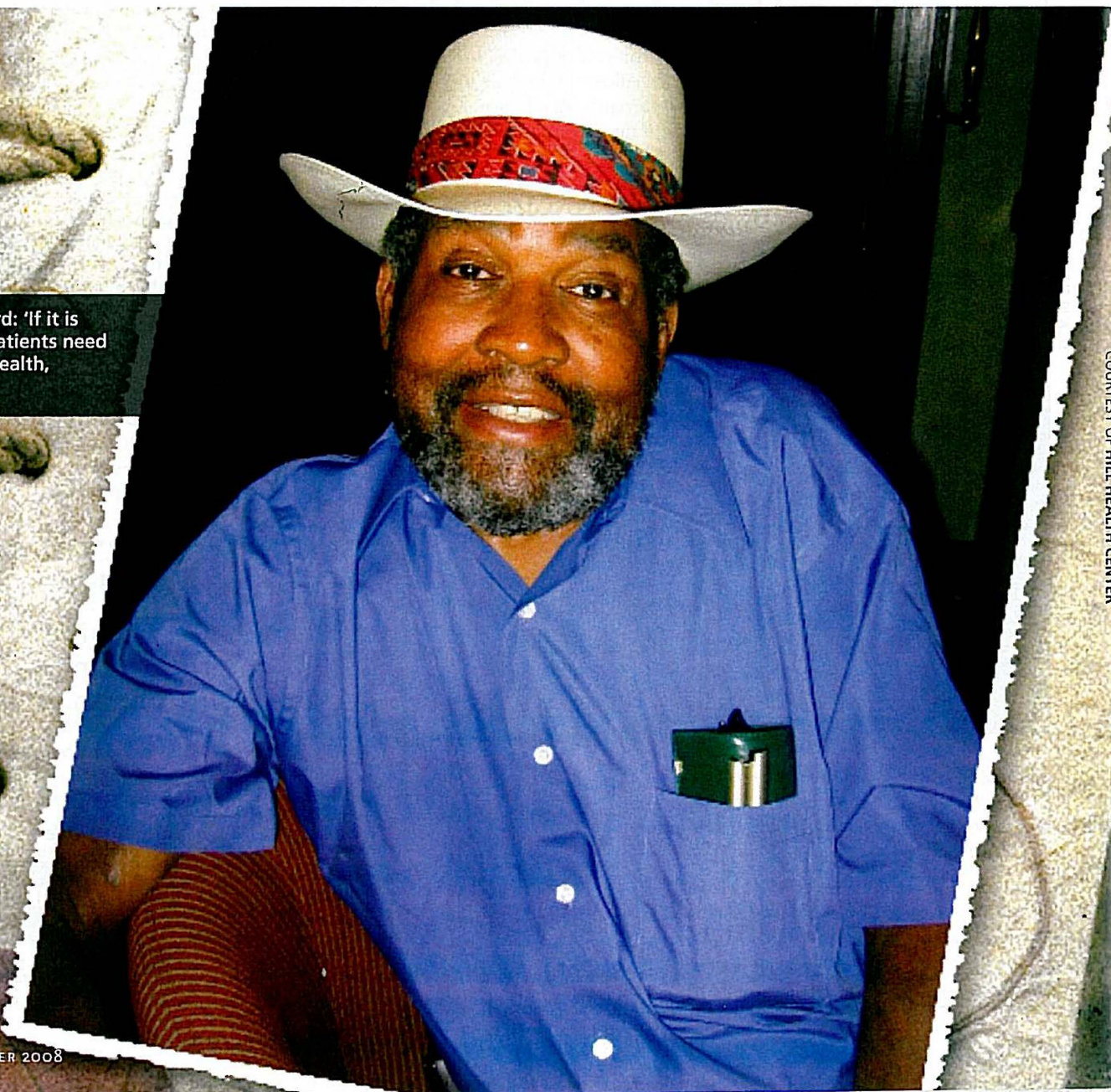
“He is considered the pioneer and trailblazer for the growth and sustainability of federally qualified health centers,” says James Rawlings, executive director of community health at Yale-New Haven Hospital. “Those who have no recourse always have the centers as a provider.”

Executive director of Hill Health Corp. at the time of his death, Scott worked

for 40 years in the cause of local and affordable health care. In the 1980s, as president of the National Association of Community Health Centers, Scott fought to keep federal funding flowing during a period of budget cuts and is credited with helping the movement survive.

“Scotty was very skillful, very diplomatic and very successful in helping individuals understand the role of [community health centers],” Rawlings says. “He did a wonderful job.”

Scott's watchword: 'If it is something our patients need for their better health, let's try to do it.'



COURTESY OF HILL HEALTH CENTER

Scott came to New Haven in the 1960s from his native Arkansas to study public health at Yale. After earning his master's in 1968 he took the post of director of training and education at the newly created Hill Health Center.

At the time Scott was named the center's executive director, in 1972, Hill Health's budget was less than a million dollars with only about 70 people on staff.

Today the Hill Health Corp. manages 17 sites across the state with a total annual budget of \$40 million and nearly 500 employees. More than 28,000 clients from 100 cities and towns were served last year and the center recorded more than 175,000 patient visits.

As a leader of the center, Scott was revered for his vision as well as a laid-back management style, says Robert Kilpatrick, Hill Health Corp.'s director of development.

"He would give a lot of free rein to the people working underneath him — that was one of things I liked about him," Kilpatrick says. "He was inspiring me to do as much as I could in developing programs and grant resources."

Scott believed in expanding Hill Health to meet the community's needs, Kilpatrick adds.

"He wanted to provide as many services as seemed to be reasonable for a community health center," Kilpatrick says. "That was his guiding light: If it was something our patients needed for their better health, let's try to do it."

In addition to building Hill Health, Scott rose to national prominence in the 1980s when Reagan-era budget-cutting threatened the entire foundation of community health centers. Scott worked with legislators and cabinet officials to preserve funding and highlight the role of centers as part of the health-care safety net.

In later years he helped to found and lead the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut and the Community Health Network of Connecticut, a nonprofit managed care organization for Medicaid patients. Scott also served on the boards of the Connecticut Hospice, Gaylord Hospital, the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Yale-New Haven Hospital and the Hill Development Corp., among others.

In 2003, more than 1,000 people honored Scott's accomplishments at a tribute at Yale's Woolsey Hall. Funds raised at the event also helped endow a scholarship in his name at Yale's School of Epidemiology and Public Health.

Scott died on August 28 after battling cancer for several years.

As community health centers nationwide face an uncertain funding environment, Kilpatrick says Scott's work was crucial in laying strong foundations for the future.

"Now [community health centers] are really quite a force in getting basic health care to low-income people," Kilpatrick says. "That hasn't been easy, but the movement is still going strong."

The centers are especially crucial in states like Connecticut that have no public hospital system, Rawlings adds.

"It provides some safety net," he says. With 47 million Americans and counting uninsured, health centers "are more important than ever."

— Liese Klein

Source:
American Diabetes
Association

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