

Duncan Clark Awardee

William Schaffner, MD

2011

Professor and Chairman, Department of Preventive Medicine
Professor of Medicine (Infectious Diseases)
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine
Consultant in Epidemiology, Tennessee Department of Health



Dr. Schaffner attended Yale College with the help of a Ford Foundation scholarship. Following his graduation, he attended the Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg, Germany as a Fulbright Scholar. At Cornell University Medical College he fell under the thrall of Walsh McDermott and his prevention faculty, worked on diarrheal disease projects in Mexico throughout medical school and became committed to an investigative career. After medical residency and a Fellowship in infectious diseases at Vanderbilt, Dr. Schaffner joined the CDC as an Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officer. He was assigned to the state health department in Rhode Island. After the state's epidemiologist took another position, Schaffner was given those responsibilities. The CDC/Rhode Island experience was transforming; he made a second career commitment--to public health. Returning to Nashville, Dr. Schaffner has knit together three careers, one in academia, a second in public health and a third as a public advocate for prevention through the news media.

The major themes of Schaffner's work have included hospital infection control, the effective use of vaccines in both pediatric and adult populations, disease outbreak investigations, the use of medical administrative data bases for the detection and prevention of adverse outcomes, and clear communication of public health/prevention information to both the profession and the general public.

Currently, Dr. Schaffner is a consultant in public health policy and communicable disease control for numerous national and local institutions, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the Tennessee Department of Health, and the American College of Physicians. He is President of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and was Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Infectious Diseases Society of America as well as a member of numerous expert advisory groups on national immunization policy. He has contributed over 400 scientific articles and textbook chapters. Dr. Schaffner's contributions to preventive medicine have been recognized by the James D. Bruce Award of the American College of Physicians, the Ronald Davis Award of the American College of Preventive Medicine and the Sedgwick Medal of the American Public Health Association.

Dr. Schaffner is a strong proponent of collaboration between academic medical centers and public health institutions in order to enhance the scientific basis of public health practice and to create informed public policy. He continues to be a respected and frequent authority on public health issues in the national and international media.