TuSalud

R.I.P. Stephaun Elite Wallace, PhD, HIV Scientist and House Ballroom Legend

An epidemiologist who addressed HIV and COVID-19 disparities, Stephaun Elite Wallace loved music and founded the House of Marc Jacobs.

August 8, 2023 By Trent Straube

Stephaun Elite Wallace, PhD, an epidemiologist, social justice and HIV advocate and legend of the house ballroom scene, died Saturday, August 5, 2023. He was 45. A cause of death was not disclosed.

The director of external relations for Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center's HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) in Seattle, Wallace was also a staff scientist at Fred Hutch, a clinical assistant professor at the University of Washington and an affiliate professor at Yale, according to a statement from HVTN.

> We mourn the death of Dr. Stephaun Elite Wallace, who passed away on August 5, 2023. Stephaun was a research epidemiologist and public health and social justice leader. He was the Director of External Relations for Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center and HIV Vaccine Trials Network. pic.twitter.com/jza8UTKs4O
>
> — HVTN (@HelpEndHIV) August 6, 2023

"Dr. Wallace's interests sat at the intersection of public health and social justice with a particular and intentional focus on increasing the positive health outcomes among members of racial/ethnic and gender/sexual minority groups in the United States and internationally," noted HVTN, adding that Wallace also launched the inaugural Office of Community Engagement for the University of

Washington/Fred Hutch Center for AIDS Research.

On X (formerly Twitter), Wallace described himself as: “Globetrotting, music loving, epidemiologist, advocate, and house ballroom legend. He/Dr. #LGBTStem #FirstGen #HIV #COVID19 #TB #Cancer #HouseofMarcJacobs.”

Colleagues and friends noted his passing, posting condolenses and rememberances on social media, such as the two posts below.

Rest in Power to my brother, friend, fellow Scorpio, colleague, mentor and motivator- the ELITE Dr. Stephaun E. Wallace @imstephaunelite
A good portion of my unwavering passion for community, global public health and overall health equity stemmed from you, always pushing me to… pic.twitter.com/sWm1rhlLJB
— Donte Prayer (@jdonteprayer) August 5, 2023

Sitting with the heaviest of hearts. I don’t have the words to describe how truly amazing @imstephaunelite was. Sending love to his vast community of friends and family. May his memory be a blessing and an inspiration. https://t.co/5pPKMcXFvH
— Jen Balkus, PhD, MPH (she/her) (@drjenbalkus) August 6, 2023

During the COVID pandemic, Wallace worked to address health disparities, promote vaccinations and improve health and science understanding in the Black community. His efforts, including those with the COVID-19 Prevention Network, earned him the praise of Bill Gates, who interviewed Wallace for the book How to Prevent the Next Pandemic.

“For many people, science is still very much a mystery; it still feels like there’s a veil over this process,” Wallace says in the video Bill Gates’s Heroes in the Field: Dr. Stephaun Wallace. “Part of my role is to take this veil off.… Often, I encounter myths and misinformation about COVID-19. The distrust in science and medicine is rooted in day-to-day-experience with systems that routinely show them that their lives don’t matter. Everyday experiences of racism and xenophobia contribute to people’s hesitancy and skepticism.”

You can watch the interview on YouTube and below:

Wallace grew up in Los Angeles during the ’80s and ’90s and is revered as a legendary father in the ballroom community, notes a memorial to him on InCloudForever.com. He was preceded in death by his parents, according to the site’s biography, and he “leaves behind a brother, Jeremiah, a sister, Krystal, and a large and extended chosen family with children from many houses, including The House of Elite, which he reopened in 2004, The House of Blahnik, and The House of Marc Jacobs that he founded in 2021.”

Wallace had posted the below item on Facebook in February, an example of his devotion to the LGBTQ community and other minority populations:

For related stories in POZ about Wallace and his work, see “Faith Leaders Who Promoted COVID-19 Vaccines Pivot to Fight HIV” and “An Open Letter to Michael Johnson.”

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