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APA News

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State Dept. Assignment Comes To Tragic End in Africa

Ken Hausman

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A well-known psychiatrist who loved his career, as well as adventure and risk-taking, died in Africa doing what he loved.

California psychiatrist William Callahan Jr., M.D., died last month at age 53 following a climbing accident in South Africa. Callahan, who was always up for an adventure, had closed his long-time private practice in Orange County, Calif., in 2012 to join the U.S. Department of State in Accra, Ghana, as a regional medical officer and psychiatrist. His territory encompassed 13 countries in West Africa. He had recently extended his tour in Ghana for an additional six months, which meant that he would have been stationed there until May 2015.

According to an account in the South African publication *IOL News*, Callahan fell to his death while on a solo hike in a treacherous area in the Table Mountain range near Cape Town on December 12, 2013. It took five rescue teams from South Africa's Wilderness Search and Rescue hours to locate Callahan's body after he was reported missing. The site could be reached only by helicopter.

Psychiatrist Kenneth Dekleva, M.D., director of mental health services for the Department of State in Washington, D.C., told the *Orange County Register* that Callahan's death is "a huge loss for our organization. He represented the best in psychiatry in my opinion. We're very proud to have known him and to have had him as part of our team."



William Callahan Jr., M.D.

Ellen Dallager

Before entering a psychiatry residency, Callahan was a flight surgeon with the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command and served in Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield. In 2000, he was elected president of the Orange County Psychiatric Society, and for several years he chaired the APA Joint Commission on Public Affairs. He also served as a member of the *Psychiatric News* Editorial Advisory Board.

"Bill Callahan and I started together as residents in APA," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "He was a natural leader and had a great grasp of psychiatry and how to translate to the public what we do. His death is a loss not just to psychiatry, his patients, and their families, but to the nation—as he was an ambassador

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for how to care for persons with mental illness and substance use disorders both within the United States and as a Foreign Service psychiatrist.”

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Recalling her colleague in many of APA's communications initiatives, former APA President Nada Stotland, M.D., said, “I first knew Bill as a psychiatric public affairs/public education expert. He had already made significant inroads into the media in Orange County before being appointed to serve at the national APA level. His enthusiasm about our profession made him a natural as a clinician and teacher as well as a media strategist and spokesperson.

“As a person, Bill was more full of life than anyone I have ever known. . . . Most recently, we spoke and e-mailed about his new job with the Foreign Service—the striking improvements he had already made in the psychiatric well-being of the far-flung diplomatic staff. It is easy to believe that he took a risky mountain hike on his own, but very difficult to believe that he could not conquer those risks. How could anything extinguish that glowing light?”



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