

Renilda Hilkemeyer, RN, tells a story about the MD Anderson History

Renilda Hilkemeyer (b. 29 July 1915; d. 10 June 2006) was recruited to MD Anderson in 1955 by R. Lee Clark, MD, to become Director of Nursing, a role she served until 1977. In the 1960s, Ms. Hilkemeyer led the move to train and authorize nurses to deliver the many chemotherapeutic agents being developed for cancer care. She retired from the institution in 1984. She passed away in 2006.



MD Anderson Nurses Begin to Administer Chemotherapy

We could do a lot of things because I had enough good people. So, we hurried up and I set up committees, got policies written, got procedures written, set up educational programs. Everybody had to have orientation. Everybody got continuing education. Everybody got in service education from aides to this and this. Then when the students came, we did the same with the students. I didn't bother Dr. [R. Lee] Clark for little piddly stuff, but if I needed him for something, I got him, believe you me, and he would listen.

Chemotherapy, by law, was medical practice, just as IV therapy was a medical practice. Nurses were not permitted to do it. And I had already set up a system at M. D. Anderson when I got here that if we had something that was medical practice and we wanted to get the nurses to do it, then I had the guidelines already written out. So, we were doing chemotherapy and we taught all of our nurses who came on the staff who did not know how to do IV therapy, we taught them. We used one section in the clinic where we had a lot of IV therapy and that is where we sent them to be taught. And they had to stay until the supervisor head nurse over there said that they were qualified and they were passed. And then, we documented it in their record.

I had nurse friends of mine that were in cancer at Memorial Sloan Kettering, Roswell Park and the National Cancer Institute, and the [NIH] Clinical Center. I called four of my good friends and said I am about ready to have the nurses start giving chemotherapy, and they asked me what moon I got off of! They weren't kidding either.

Of course, we hardly got it under our belt that we were doing it until everybody in the country wanted to come down and see what we were doing with chemotherapy. What nurses are doing with chemotherapy. Frankly, I was tired of the poor patient sitting there waiting for some doctor at his convenience to come and shoot them when the nurse had as much sense to shoot that drug as he did. I always, if it was medical practice, wrote the recommendations, sent them to the Executive committee [of the Medical Staff], asked to go to the Executive committee to discuss it and get the approval from the Executive Committee, because that took care of the medical practice angle.

About This Content

This interview clip was taken from an in-depth interview conducted for the Making Cancer History Voices Oral History Project. This ongoing project currently contains almost 500 interview hours with MD Anderson institution builders.

The transcript has been edited from the original.

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Interview link: <http://library.mdanderson.org/hrc/interviews/hilkemeyerr/hilkemeyer.html>

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