

Charles A. LeMaistre, MD, talks about MD Anderson History and Leaders

Dr. LeMaistre served as MD Anderson's second president from 1978 to 1996. In an interview conducted in 2012, he sketches the early history of the new cancer established in Texas in 1941 by the state legislature. Dr. LeMaistre passed away in 2017.



A Brief History of MD Anderson

It began with the women's army against cancer in 1941, when they marched the halls of the legislature and insisted on a state hospital for cancer. Those ladies intimidated the legislature to create a state hospital. They got it done, but they didn't designate where it should go. That started the battle between Austin, Galveston, and Houston. That's when the MD Anderson Foundation came in and said, "We'll match the first appropriation of the legislature," which turned out to be \$500,000. That's why MD Anderson is here—that willingness for those ladies to take their time and really say, "I'm not going to leave here until you do this." Nobody else was asking for it, and to build a cancer hospital where people would be dying. Why are you spending state money on that? That's the kind of thing people would think about.

A gynecologist here in Houston by the name of [Ernst] Bertner said, "I'm going to get this going. I'm going to make this go." He got five faculty members from Galveston to come up and help him, and he spent the time being a gynecologist and knowing something about women's cancers. He spent the time there at Jimmy Baker's grandfather's estate, running a hospital for five years. Tell me the name of the physician you know today who gave up his practice to do that. He then headed a group that recruited [R.] Lee Clark in 1946, a plastic surgeon, a cancer surgeon in Jackson, Mississippi. He got Lee Clark over and stood by him to get him started here on a bare-bones, nothing estate called a hospital. Lee then did all the things to get the first buildings here that would serve the cancer patient, and it is from that nidus that these things had grown. What Clark did—there were two major—I guess you would call them comprehensive cancer centers at the time—one at Roswell Park in Buffalo

and at that time Memorial Hospital --it wasn't Sloan-Kettering yet. He wanted it to be a Texas operation. He started out by recruiting really outstanding clinical faculties to head the departments and the basic science faculty followed. He did dream big. I think there's magic in almost everything that's happened here.

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 400 interview hours with MD Anderson institution builders.

The transcript has been edited from the original.

The content is available for all uses.

To explore the full interview go to: <http://mdanderson.libguides.com/LeMaistreCA>

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