

Gordon Mills, MD, PhD tells a story about The Human Side of medicine

Dr. Mills joined MD Anderson in 1994. In 2006, he founded the first Department of Systems Biology in the country and served as Chair until his departure from the institution in 2017. In an interview conducted in 2016, Dr. Mills talks about the philosophy of keeping options open that governs his personal and professional decision-making.



Keeping Options Open: A Personal and Professional Strategy

I would say that the steps that I did in college and indeed, throughout my whole career, has been to keep as many options open as at all possible. So while I was doing an undergrad in the sciences and biochemistry as my specialization, my minor, and actually the majority of my classes, were in political science. Political science became a much more interesting field and area in terms of how it works, how interactions at both a personal and then a national and international level occur. I understood what I do now, is politics. I can say that that theme has continued.

I don't think it was conscious at that time. I don't think that most of the things we do that benefited us massively in the future are conscious. I mean, I think that probably, the single most important course I ever took was typing, in college, because that's what we do now for a living.

The idea of breadth and not trying to decide early, where I was going, is something that I kept doing, and even when I did a medical degree, I kept my whole science background moving and did a PhD along the way, again, keeping all possible doors open for as long as possible. I would say that when I recruit people to my lab, I tell them that our greatest strength and our greatest weakness are identical, that we are very broad, we have no fear, we will do anything that is needed, and our weakness is that we do things broadly and we may not be the best at any one of them. What we and where we gain is by integrating across many different areas, many different disciplines, and really, in the precept of systems biology, integrating that information into new concepts that are not apparent without the approaches.

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: <https://mdanderson.libguides.com/GordonM>

Interview Clip Identification:

Session number and date: 01, 05-23-2016

Segment: 01

Citations: Please provide the following information

Interview Subject's name, Clip Title, Date of Session, Historical Resources Center, Research Medical Library, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

To request an uncompressed audio file, photographs, or for information about the interview and photo collections, contact: Javier Garza, MSIS, jjgarza@mdanderson.org