

Peggy Tinkey, DVM, talks about the Human Side of medicine

Dr. Tinkey served as Chair of the Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery from 2006 – 2019, the year she retired. In an interview conducted in 2016, she talks about the sense of vocation she has brought to her work with animals and research that serves human health.



Faith, Values, and a Sense of Purpose

You learn a lot of rules and that kind of thing when you're a Catholic. But that's not what I think made the impression on me. The impression is you're here for a reason, the reason is something bigger than you, and that's what you should spend your life pursuing.

That belief and conviction has really been a foundation of my life. I had to have a rock to stand on and respect for all things living, and to give living creatures -- to do things that attempt to benefit their welfare and keep them free from pain and distress and fear. Maybe that's just a moral code. I don't think you have to be in a religious school to have that moral code but it was definitely there. The other thing that I think a religious education gave me was a very strong conviction that there is a difference between humans and animals and that God gave animals to people for their benefit. This certainly didn't give us a right to ever abuse or waste animals. But it did give us a sovereign human right to have animals as food or perform humane animal research in order to find benefits for human health.

I think if I didn't have that conviction --animal research for a veterinarian can be an emotionally very tough thing. When you're doing research, by and large, you have perfectly normal animals.... You either are testing a drug to try and see where's the level of toxicity here, or you implant a tumor in an animal or you create a nerve defect. But while you're going through the process and while you're the one on the ground interacting with those animals every single day, that can be very emotionally hard. I don't want to get all emotional now, but there have been a lot of days that I went home and was just upset because of whatever was going on, or because we were doing something that I knew was the right thing, but it didn't make it an easy thing. So having the conviction that there's somebody that we're going to help, somebody's mom or dad or sister or brother or beloved grandmother, somebody we are going to help from the information we're getting here and my role is to do everything I possibly can to make that animal's life as good as it can possibly be while we're still achieving that research outcome.

Basically that's what we do here. And we do an extremely good job and I'm proud of that. And would I do it again? Yes, I absolutely would do it again....I can make a difference to those animals that are enrolled in research projects. I can advocate for them. I can push every day to make sure that their life is as good as it can possibly be, acknowledging that sometimes they're undergoing very rigorous studies. And that's part of why I'm proud of all the people I work with here in this department, because every single day they have skin in the game.

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.

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