

## Steve Stuyck, MPH, tells a story about Leading Leaders and the Institution

Mr. Stuyck (retired) joined MD Anderson in 1975 as Director of Public Information and served as Vice President of Public Affairs from 2000 to 2013. He worked under four presidents, including the first full time president, R. Lee Clark, MD. Here he talks about taking on a controversial initiative that would have an impact on the institution's relationships with patients.



### *Creating the First Cancer Information Service*

There was a big contract with the NCI called the Cancer Information Service...It was the very first NCI-funded public education programs about cancer. There was a toll-free WATS line—an 800 number that served the state of Texas where people could call you with their questions about cancer, and there were some educational programs targeted for minority and underserved audiences. This was brand new, and I cannot convey to you how controversial it was at the time.

This was 1975 when most communication about cancer was between doctors and patients. And the notion that trained lay people could answer the phone and answer a technical question about cancer was preposterous to many people, especially to doctors....One MD Anderson doctor said to me, “I hope you screw up early before you do some real damage.” Nobody wanted to touch it. I know that sounds so foolish nowadays....but it was just a different era.

It was very pioneering. Hell, I'm thirty years old, and I'm thinking this sounds like a great idea to me. So I volunteered to Dr. Clark --thirty years old with a bachelor's degree, at that time-- and they make me the principal investigator on the most—not the director but the PI-- on a very innovative and controversial contract, thinking this would probably go nowhere at any time.

And it worked out fine. (laughs) We ran that contract for thirty years. We had to get all the resources, find space, hire people—all that sort of thing. We had to set up the 800 number, develop training programs and quality assurance programs for the people who answered the phones, develop liaisons in the community with African American and Latino populations, create media materials and get them approved by doctors. We were taking—well, near the end of it, it was 100,000 a year or so. This was a national network of about fifteen or so contracts all around the country.

CIS helped open the doors. It was a national and worldwide movement—the educational movement in health care and disease prevention—and we were just part of it.

## 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/StuyckSC>

### About the speaker:

Steven Stuyck, MPH (ret. 2013), was interviewed in 2013. He served as: Director, Public Information and Education (1975 – 1985); Assistant to the President (1981 – 1986); Assistant Vice President for Public Affairs (1985 – 1988); Associate Vice President for Public Affairs (1988 – 1999); Vice President, Public Affairs (2000 – 2013).

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