

Charles Balch, MD, tells a story about 2nd President, Charles A. LeMaistre, MD

Dr. Balch was recruited to MD Anderson in 1985 to serve as Head of the Division of Surgery and Chair of the Department of Surgical Oncology. He went on to serve as VP of Hospitals and Clinics, (1993-1994) and Exec. VP of Health Affairs (1994-1996). He worked closely with Charles LeMaistre throughout this time and, in a 2019 interview recalls Dr. LeMaistre's work on key legislation that would help secure the institution's financial stability.



Charles LeMaistre Promotes Key Legislation

In the timeframe of 1993 to 1995, MD Anderson was struggling financially and it had some limitations because of state regulations, including that patients could not self-refer from within Texas. We couldn't compete in Texas if physicians had to refer patients and patients couldn't self-refer. Then there were millions of dollars of indigent patient care that was not paid for by the State, and for patients who lived in Harris County. It was really an onerous part of the legislation for us. That's fine for us to take care of those patients, but we felt as a State institution that Harris County, like other counties throughout Texas, had to absorb some of the indigent patient care in their budget, and that they had a responsibility for doing that. The final area was in the State bid laws. We were doing major construction. We had a lot of capital expenditures of high-end equipment. In order to build high-quality hospitals with the technology and the infrastructure that we needed at the same level of St. Luke's Hospital, Methodist Hospital, Hermann Hospital, and other hospitals in the Texas Medical Center, we had to make our bids based upon the quality and the experience of the construction people and the equipment that we were purchasing, not necessarily whether it was the lowest bid price.

All of these things, after an analysis led by Mickey LeMaistre, were things that should be changed in the legislature if we were going to achieve a financial neutrality or a positive red line. He took the position that our competition is the private institutions within the Texas Medical Center, and that we were not able to compete financially and in terms of building the institution to the excellence. The uniqueness of Mickey LeMaistre was that he was the former Chancellor of the University of Texas. He knew the legislative process backwards and forwards. So now, as President of MD Anderson, he started working the process in order to initiate legislation to essentially free MD Anderson from these state regulations. He worked the process until the legislation was crafted. He held several receptions in Austin in order to inform the legislature that MD Anderson is unique as a resource in the state, and it should uniquely be freed from state regulations. Mickey had a big reception with George Forman, and invited all the legislators to come. I remember George Forman, whose fist was two to three times the size of mine, holding it up and said, "I want you to fight for this legislation," with a smile on his face. On the first day of the legislature in 1995, HR 192 was presented first to the House. It passed unanimously as the first piece of legislation for the year. It went immediately to the Senate, where it was passed unanimously, and Governor George W. Bush signed the legislation that afternoon. So this actually made a huge difference to MD Anderson going forward. It's one of the reasons that it thrives today.

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

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