

Alma Rodriguez, MD talks about MD Anderson History and Leaders

Dr. Rodriguez is an internist and professor of medicine in the Department of Lymphoma and Myeloma. She served as Vice President of Medical Affairs for over a decade. In an interview conducted in 2015, she talks about why chaplaincy is particularly strong at MD Anderson.



Chaplaincy at MD Anderson

We have a whole department of chaplaincy, and I think compared to most hospitals, it is quite robust, in that we have full-time chaplains of several denominations, but they all have to be certified in healthcare chaplaincy. A healthcare chaplain, if you will, needs to focus more on the spiritual concerns around illness; the questions or relationship, if you will, to a higher spiritual being. Or issues of existential anxiety: Why am I here? Why did I get this illness? Why did I survive, versus my friend, my child, my neighbor? So chaplaincies that are linked to healthcare are aligned with ... how illness then brings to the surface, the existential questions of why I exist, what is my relationship or am I worthy of a relationship to a higher entity, or higher spiritual being?

When the hospital was established, remember that it was in the 1940s. Cancer, hardly anybody survived, and so in those days, if you asked people what was important, psychology or spirituality, they would have said spirituality over and above everything else, right?

Also, in addition, I think that Houston as a community has very deep religious roots and deep spiritual roots. We have an established Jewish community, we have, of course, a Catholic community. We have Baptists, Methodists....so there's, across the board, a very broad, if you will, support for the Chaplaincy service here. It had the benefit of several lines, if you will, of spiritual practice and viewpoints to be built.

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/RodriguezMA>

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