

Eduardo Bruera, MD tells a story of Leadership Challenges

Medical Oncologist, Eduardo Bruera, MD, has served as Chair of MD Anderson's Department of Palliative, Rehabilitation, and Integrative Medicine since 1999. Here he explains how he had created a culture of transparency in his department.



## *Creating a Culture of Transparency*

At times where it was not always possible for us to understand what was going on [at the institutional level during a period of rapid change], where was the money going, where were the decisions being made, we said well, 'in the area where we can have access, there will be one hundred percent transparency on anything.' So the number of hours that each person worked, the number of patients that each person saw, the number of money that each one got paid, the number of weekends on call and evenings on call, were all transparent. Actually the allocation was done by an open committee in the auditorium, where everybody could show up and decide how we were going to organize. We usually do it three times a year for four months each time. We basically have everybody show up and say what their needs are, and review the process, so that there was completely transparency on those things. Whatever I learned, I would share with everybody in the team and occasionally, I would warn people that I was going to share that with my faculty, that I was not going to not share with my faculty when it affected them, so that they would feel that they were completely aware of what was going on, and we knew.

Decision making became one hundred percent collective, and that meant that you were going to hire someone, one hundred percent of the faculty sitting around the table says yes or no....So it's not me hiring the faculty, it's me hiring the faculty on behalf of our faculty team. If one of our members is going to ask for another 20 percent more protected time, and that's going to have impact on the rest, that's discussed by everybody. So we have everybody saying, yes, David might bring another grant and this might help all of us, let's have that protected time .... It takes more time. It's more time consuming for me, but it does ensure that people feel that they have autonomy, that they have a certain amount of control of their working environment, control of the decision making, that they can opine on how things are going and how people are doing.

We also emphasized a lot the open-door policy. The door is always open for anyone who wants to show up with a problem or a need. They can email, they can page, or they can just walk in, and I made it a point that everybody could walk in at any time and interrupt me, to the point that when I need to do something, I sometimes have to leave the office, because I need to hide somewhere where I can do some work ... in an uninterrupted way. Otherwise, the door

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was always open. But that I think provides a little bit of guidance for other ones to be available too, because then if I am making myself one hundred percent open, well the rest should also be open to others, right? I think that promoted a bit more of collaboration, sharing ideas. There is my idea board where I have all kind of ideas, but ... when I have an idea of a new study, I just find someone who wants to do it and coach them into getting it done, rather than doing it myself, and so that way, that person starts to learn how to ride a bike and becomes more independent. [00:59:21]

We started doing anonymous surveys about workload. How is the workload this month or the last three or four months. Which is the area that you find more difficult? And then bringing those to our business meetings allows us to reallocate people to different places, based on how they express things. We try to do it anonymously because I have a bigger microphone than an assistant professor, and ... that assistant professor might try to please me, instead of expressing their dissent. I have to say with great pride, that when we have our business meetings, people feel totally confident about dissenting with me on anything and I find that that's an incredibly good thing, because that means that they feel free, they feel that they are not going to be paying any consequences for speaking their mind.

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## 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.

The content is available for public use.

**Interview link:** <https://mdanderson.libguides.com/BrueraE>

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Photos and archival material: Javier Garza, MSIS, [jjgarza@mdanderson.org](mailto:jjgarza@mdanderson.org)