

Gabriel Hortobagyi, MD tells a story about Leading Self

Gabriel Hortobagyi, MD, served as Founding Chair of the Dept. of Breast Medical Oncology from 1992-2012. In an interview conducted in 2013, he talks about how his perspective had to change in order to leader the strong personalities in his department.



Leading by Stepping Back

Physicians are fiercely independent—and especially physicians in certain specialties—and I point first at the surgeons. Even within that surgical group of very accomplished and highly skilled surgeons, there were no two who did the same thing. And each of them felt that they knew better than the other two or three how to treat breast cancer. And therefore to question why was—to question their integrity—to question their skills. And in retrospect, perhaps some of that is because they couldn't tell me why they did it differently than the next person, why they cut here as opposed to here. But that is just my theory.

It takes a process until you are comfortable enough in your skin to say, “Okay, so this person from a different specialty is asking me something that goes to the fundament of what I think is my knowledge about my specialty. How dare he?” And as opposed to, “Well, he is asking me either because he doesn't understand, and I haven't explained it well enough or because there might be another option that I should consider.” But that takes taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture. And I think that ability to step back is what helped me tremendously over the next several decades to bring our group together and make it a more productive and more interactive group.

But it means sometimes—and I am not exactly a humble person—but it sometimes means swallowing your pride and swallowing your tongue and just becoming a better listener and sometimes just serving as the lightning rod for other people to vent and do their thing until they realize that I am not trying to threaten them or take anything away from them.

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/HortobagyiGN>

About the speaker:

Gabriel Hortobagyi, MD (ret.)

Interviewed: 2012/13

Primary appt: Department of Breast Medical Oncology

Research: multimodality and adjuvant and neoadjuvant treatments for breast cancer; personalized therapies and gene therapy.

Admin: Chief of Section, Breast Medical Oncology (1984 – 1992); Founding Chair, Department of Breast Medical Oncology (1992 – 2012).

Interview Clip Identification:

Subject: Gabriel Hortobagyi, MD

Session number and date: 01, 30 November 2012

Segment: 07

Clip category: Leadership

Citations: Please provide the following information

Interview Subject's name, Clip Title, Date of Session, Historical Resources Center, Research Medical Library, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

To request an uncompressed audio file, photographs, or for information about the interview and photo collections, contact:

Interview Collection: Tacey A. Rosolowski, PhD, trosolowski@mdanderson.org

Photos and archival material: Javier Garza, MSIS, jjgarza@mdanderson.org