

## Thomas Buchholz, MD tells a story Leadership Problems and Challenges

**Dr. Buchholz** served as Executive Vice President and Physician in Chief from 2014-2017). In an interview conducted in 2018, he talks about issues of accountability and responsibility that emerged when the institution was coping with a financial crisis.



### *Who Owns a Mess?*

So it's all excitement about local autonomy and accountability. It's very popular, but, believe me, I met with hundreds of department chairs, and said, "How come you have a \$10 million deficit here?" "Well, that was—I don't know—that was an administrator that we had to get rid of because... That was left because this faculty member left, and I didn't know how that was happening, and they're not here anymore, so it's not my responsibility," right? Well, it is your responsibility, right? I'm sorry, maybe your segment, none of your faculty are going to get a raise because of that. And over here, this group's doing well: we're going to give them a 10% raise. That's not MD Anderson culture, to have these inequities ... this competition within the group.... A chair leaves, and you uncover, wow, there's this cesspool of stuff left behind. And it's not really the new chair's problem, right? They didn't do it, but who owns that now? Does the division own that? Well, no.

I got an opportunity to mingle with lots of CEOs in healthcare summits and stuff. We, in many respects, were the envy of the world with our system of having the healthcare system and the physician system all integrated into one thing, [where] the economic incentives of being salaried was controlled. You didn't have economic competition between services. You could truly work as a group. You could support your research effort with clinical revenue. It's the perfect system. You could share services, decrease expenses. You can focus on institutional initiatives. You just need the right... Everybody wants to operate as a system, rather than a series of fiefdoms. Our structure was designed to allow that to happen in a way that most academic healthcare systems don't have.

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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.

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

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

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