

## Peggy Tinkey, DVM, tells a story about Leading Others

Dr. Tinkey served as Chair of the Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery from 2006 – 2019, the years she retired. In an interview conducted in 2016, she describes one of the most challenging situations she encountered as chair and how it underscored the value of conflict.



### *A Research Failure Creates Conflict and Highlights Ethics*

The next [research project] illustrates some of the emotional rigor. One of the plastic surgeons really wanted to develop an artificial trachea. The trachea is an incredibly hard organ to replace. He'd done some preliminary work in rats. He'd had some pretty good success. Now he needed to go to an animal of relevant size. We elected to use a dog. We knew this was going to be a very hands-on-intensive study because it was surgical and we anticipated that we were probably going to be doing a lot of nursing care on the animals.

Long story short, we could not develop a biomaterial structure that met the criteria, and when the animal moved his neck it would break apart the suture line. I think we only used probably about six or seven animals for this. But the reality, like I said, it was very nursing-intensive, they were hound dogs, very good dogs, big lovable dogs, and when the postsurgical complications occurred they were strenuous on the dog. It would result in a lot of respiratory distress. We were up here day and night. Sometimes the animal would go into respiratory distress within a 30-minute period. It was a rough study. And we had veterinarians crying, we had technicians crying. When the plastic surgeon decided to stop the study, I think he was just like, "I can't handle this anymore."

We started the study, and about the third or so dog in, one of the technicians said, "I don't think this study ought to go on. I'm going to ask the IACUC to come and take a look at it." And that was an interesting time too because even in the Veterinary Department there were very strong and very opposite opinions about that. It's never bad to have the IACUC come and take a look at it. But still the feel that it had from the investigator felt betrayed I guess a little...and it was a technician. I was working closely with another veterinarian. Actually she and I were on opposite sides of it. I was on the side of there are people dying because they don't have a trachea and yeah, this is a very rigorous study but I think we need to continue to try. And she was of the opinion it's not ready, don't try.... I really went home several nights thinking maybe we just shouldn't be doing this

It created a lot of tension even in the Veterinary Department with people saying, "This is inhumane, we shouldn't be doing it," and other people saying, "Look, this is the history of research. We're going to do everything we can to make sure the dog doesn't experience pain or distress, but just because we're failing doesn't mean it isn't work that should go on."

So that was a learning experience for me too because that was probably one of the most rigorous things I had to deal with, with veterinarians disagreeing with each other. Disagreeing like yelling at each other in the hallway disagreeing. It's almost always productive. Maybe I'll say it's always productive. There's always value in a diversity of opinions. And when I say yelling, that's only a reflection of how deeply people feel. So there's never a downside to people feeling really engaged and passionate about stuff. The downside would be if it stopped the conversation. The good thing is it forces people. I might say publicly, "I'm 100% sure this study should go on," but privately I'm thinking about it. And I'm thinking about what somebody else has said, and I'm considering and reconsidering. And maybe it prompts me to either do a little more reading or call a couple more people or something like that. Because you have to be willing to question yourself. It sounds counterintuitive but I think that's the biggest value of conflict. It makes you question yourself. They might not admit it right there in front of you, but they go home and think about it. And that's the other cool thing about veterinarians too. Like I said, we may have just a go to the mat contest about something, but it's for the animal. That's what brings us together at the end. I might think A and you might think B and we might really be at odds with each other because we're so passionate. But we're both passionate because we think it's the right thing for the animal. And at the end we'll come together on it.

## 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:** this interview is not yet available online. Please contact Tacey A. Rosolowski, contact info below.

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