

# Prof. Stephen M. Hahn: relentlessly pursuing the mission to end cancer in the world

Received: 09 January 2019; Accepted: 23 January 2019; Published: 28 January 2019.

doi: 10.21037/jhmhp.2019.01.03

View this article at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/jhmhp.2019.01.03>

## Editor's note

Cancer, being one of the leading causes of death worldwide, is causing a great burden in the overall healthcare industry. According to National Institutes of Health, the United States would be stormed by an estimated 1,735,350 number of new cancer cases together with 609,640 deaths from this deadly disease (1). Being one of the largest cancer centers in the world, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in the US has more than seven decades of experience in eliminating cancer of any kind and is world-renowned for using and developing front-line diagnostic technology. JHMHP is honored to have an exclusive interview with the Chief Medical Executive (CME) of MD Anderson, Prof. Stephen M. Hahn who will share with us his daily routine as the CME, the essence and challenges of hospital management and how their center is striving to end cancer (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 1** Prof. Stephen M. Hahn.

## Expert's introduction

Prof. Stephen M. Hahn, CME, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, the US.

### Academic appointments

- ❖ Professor, Division of Radiation Oncology, Department of Radiation Oncology, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2014–present.
- ❖ Gilbert H. Fletcher Memorial Distinguished Chair, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2014–present.
- ❖ Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, Division of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2005–2014.
- ❖ Henry K. Pancoast Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2005–2014.
- ❖ Professor, Division of Internal Medicine (secondary appointment), University of Pennsylvania School of

Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2005–2012.

- ❖ Associate Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, Division of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2001–2005.
- ❖ Assistant Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, Division of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 1996–2001.

### Administrative appointments

- ❖ Chief Medical Executive, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2018–present.
- ❖ Deputy President and Chief Operating Officer, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2017–2018.
- ❖ Division Head, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2015–2017.
- ❖ Department Chair, Department of Radiation Oncology, The University of Texas MD Anderson

- Cancer Center, Houston, TX, 2015–2017.
- ❖ Chair, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2005–2014.
- ❖ Director of Research, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2004–2005.
- ❖ Vice Chair, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2004–2005.
- ❖ Director, Clinical Research, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, 2001–2005.
- ❖ Director, Clinical Services, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 2000–2001.
- ❖ Director, Photodynamic Therapy Program, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 1996–2006.
- ❖ Chief, Department of Prostate Cancer Clinic, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD, 1994–1995.
- ❖ Chief Resident, University of California San Francisco Hospitals, San Francisco, CA, 1987–1988.

## Interview

### *The road to Chief Medical Executive*

**JHMHP:** You used to be a radiation and medical oncologist before taking on the management roles.

**What actually makes you interested in management?**

**Prof. Hahn:** I remain very interested in clinical medicine. My interest in management roles arose through the understanding that involvement in medical administration allows one to have a potentially greater impact on patient care and patient outcomes.

I was drawn to MD Anderson because I wanted to be a part of an organization completely dedicated every day of the year to cancer care; the outstanding multidisciplinary care delivered here; the ability to positively affect the standard of care for cancer patients; and most importantly, our mission, to end cancer in Texas, the nation and the world.

**JHMHP:** What is your daily routine as the CME of MD Anderson? How do you manage to fulfill your duties as you are involved in a number of other medical associations?

**Prof. Hahn:** My daily routine as the CME involves

meeting with key constituents of the clinical and research enterprise to facilitate our mission. An important part of my job is to increase alignment across a very large organization. We do through this through huddles, team meetings, and engagement sessions with frontline faculty and staff.

I remain very active in many associations but my formal leadership responsibilities in outside medical organizations have decreased substantially because of my administrative role.

**JHMHP:** What are the key qualities of being a doctor and being an administrator in healthcare?

**Prof. Hahn:** To me, the key qualities of being a doctor and an administrator in the healthcare field are the same: compassion, empathy, professionalism, emotional intelligence, technical knowledge and skill.

### *The essence and challenges of hospital management*

**JHMHP:** What do you regard as the essential elements in hospital management?

**Prof. Hahn:** It is critical to have engagement of the frontline faculty and staff who really understand the issues and challenges that our patients face and can help us solve any problems that arise. A relentless focus on our mission to end cancer and a principled, compassionate approach to all issues that arise.

The direction of a hospital's development has to strive toward providing the highest value care to patients which means the absolute best outcomes as well as the most impactful research to further the standard of care.

**JHMHP:** Over the years, what challenges have you encountered when you manage the center?

**Prof. Hahn:** MD Anderson is a very large and impactful institution. The main challenge arises around the creation of alignment of various groups, providers, other faculty, frontline staff, nurses, pharmacists, and administrators, who make up our great institution. Another major challenge is ensuring there is regular and robust communication among these groups so that we are all moving in the same direction in support of our mission.

**JHMHP:** We believe each hospital will come across a time when patients are not satisfied with the services provided by the hospital. Can you share with us your experience in handling conflicts with patients?

**Prof. Hahn:** Our philosophy is to take all patient complaints seriously and investigate them fully. Often a

phone call or brief discussion with the patient can help resolve any dissatisfaction. Other times a more intensive approach is needed. The most important thing for us is to create a culture around service to our patients and patient satisfaction so that we can prevent episodes of dissatisfaction.

**JHMHP: How does MD Anderson keep the staff motivated and creative? Is there any incentive mechanism or program?**

**Prof. Hahn:** Our mission and the dedication to that mission is the most important motivator for our staff and faculty. We do offer incentive programs but, in the end, we find what most motivates and stimulates creativity is our mission.

*Relentlessly pursuing mission while facing headwinds*

**JHMHP: How do you see the future of MD Anderson? What do you aim to achieve in the next decade?**

**Prof. Hahn:** Our future is bright. We have terrific faculty and staff. We have an amazing dedication to our mission and to research-driven multidisciplinary patient care. There are headwinds to the delivery of quality healthcare around the world and we must face those headwinds and do the absolute best for our patients. We will continue in the next decade to relentlessly pursue our mission to end cancer.

**JHMHP: As a successful CEO and clinical oncologist, what would be your advice to younger generations in pursuing their dreams?**

**Prof. Hahn:** Always focus on the patients, never make it about yourself and create an environment where everyone can do his/her best to advance the mission.

**Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to Prof. Stephen M. Hahn for sharing his insights and opinions with us.

*Funding:* None.

doi: 10.21037/jhmhp.2019.01.03

**Cite this article as:** Cheung M, Li B. Prof. Stephen M. Hahn: relentlessly pursuing the mission to end cancer in the world. *J Hosp Manag Health Policy* 2019;3:5.

**Footnote**

*Provenance and Peer Review:* This article was commissioned by the editorial office, *Journal of Hospital Management and Health Policy* for the series “Meet the Experts: the Cutting Edge in Hospital Management”. The article did not undergo external peer review.

*Conflicts of Interest:* Both authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form (available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/jhmhp.2019.01.03>). The series “Meet the Experts: the Cutting Edge in Hospital Management” was commissioned by the editorial office without any funding or sponsorship. The authors report that they are full-time employees of AME publishing company (publisher of the journal). The authors have no other conflicts of interest to declare.

*Ethical Statement:* The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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