

BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE'S NEW CLINIC AND HOSPITAL Taking Personalized Medicine to a New Level

by Richard Varr

Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) is building a new hospital that will not only add a shining tower to Houston's Medical Center but will also introduce a bold style of personalized medicine – one that dares to predict a patient's prognosis. Simply put, the new academic hospital will integrate research in genetics and molecular biology into patient care that allows for personalized genetics-based medicine.

"We're designing our hospital based on research, clinical care and service, and I don't think anyone has designed a new facility that integrates all of these elements with personalized medicine," says Donna Sollenberger, the take-charge Executive Vice President of Baylor College of Medicine and CEO of Baylor Clinic and Hospital. "The biggest benefit for Houston is that people will have a choice of a hospital and clinic that is embedding personalized care for patients into its delivery system."

The new hospital's care delivery will emphasize *service* to ensure that individuals receive care that's unique to their needs. Before a first doctor's visit, for example, a patient might fill out a questionnaire online that will be used to determine the physician visits and tests to be done that a patient will need.

"From that questionnaire, we would determine whether the patient needs to see an internist, cardiologist, an endocrinologist or other physician, and perhaps determine whether it's time for a colonoscopy or mammogram," says Sollenberger. "We would coordinate all those appointments and tests for a single day. Doing all this in one day and at one facility will set us apart."

Patient rooms will take into effect recent research on how building design affects patient healing. Every room will be private to minimize the chance of infection. Room design will allow nurses to have greater visibility to assigned patients and accommodate more light and space for family members.

"We know that having family and friends in the room and being involved actually improves the patient's outcome," explains Sollenberger.

Improved safety measures include installing handrails from the patient's bed to the restroom to lessen the chance of a patient falling.

Sollenberger, who began her career as an English teacher who – through an upward healthcare management career resulting from hard work and peppered with a bit of luck – landed the BCM CEO and Executive Vice President positions last fall. She is overseeing the building of the new 250-bed hospital, currently under construction in the Texas Medical Center at the intersection of Old Spanish Trail and Cambridge Street. The facility will include an 11-floor patient tower, laboratories, pharmacies, operating rooms, an entire floor of diagnostic imaging, catheterization labs and more.

In particular, there will be 58 ICU rooms, 15 operating rooms, labs supported with robotics, a pharmacy that has a robot dispensing drugs and a five-floor clinic. An adjacent five-floor section will house faculty offices. Expected outpatient capability will be up to 300,000 visits each year. Individual service lines such

as Heart, Thoracic and Vascular, Neuroscience, Advanced Surgery, Transplantation and Oncology will house all physicians and services for the service line on an entire floor.

The \$568 million hospital project is set for completion by April 2011. Financial support has included bonds and contributions from board members and from the community.

BCM's new approach to personalized medicine also stems from its leadership in sequencing a human genome for an individual and delivering the whole genetic sequence on a chip – a process that once took tens of millions of dollars and several years, but which will one day be affordable on an individual basis.

“Sequencing an individual's DNA is probably the easy part,” says Sollenberger. “The hard part is determining what to do when a patient receives a genetic sequence that may predict future diseases like cancer or heart disease.”

So, how do you take that information and responsibly educate a patient to his or her own genetic sequence?

Sollenberger explains, “By taking that genetic sequence and by using physicians and trained genetic counselors, we can develop a prevention or intervention plan to help that individual have a better life outcome.”

Sollenberger brings extensive experience to BCM with a career spanning several positions in different states. After teaching, she worked in the State of Illinois Department of Conservation and then landed a job as administrator of the department of surgery at a new medical school in Springfield. “I applied for it, was interviewed and at 26 years old I was hired,” she recalls with a laugh. “Everyone other than the physicians reported to me, and everyone that worked for me was basically older than I was.”

She held that job for 15 years and raised three children in the meantime. After that, she applied for a surgery administrator position at Houston's M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

“Long story short, I got the job here in Houston,” she says.

But she achieved perhaps her biggest break in 1994 when the hospital administrator resigned and when she was asked to take on the job in the interim during a nationwide search for a new administrator. But to her surprise, *she* was hired for the position.

“I tell people you need to have reasonable confidence in yourself and a willingness to take on new assignments. Dr. Charles Le Maistre, the then CEO at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center came to me and said, ‘we want you to do the job on a continual basis.’ So, I did,” said Sollenberger.

She took the position as Vice President of Hospital and Clinics, and at the time was the only and first female VP at M.D. Anderson.

From M.D. Anderson, Sollenberger took the position of Executive Vice President and COO at City of Hope Cancer Center in Los Angeles. Three years later, she returned to her roots in the Midwest when a CEO opening became available at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics. She then came to what she calls “a once in a lifetime opportunity” last summer at BCM.

“There are not many chances for people in my profession to start something absolutely from scratch,” she admits. “Lots of hospitals are being built, but by systems that have hospitals that already exist or have one that’s too old and has to be replaced. But we are literally building it from the ground up, and that’s the exciting and the terrifying aspect of what we’re doing,” she admits. “But the science at Baylor College of Medicine is so incredible that the vision can absolutely be realized.”

Sollenberger also took the job for personal reasons.

“When we moved to Houston the first time, my daughter, Shannon, was a freshman in high school and she actually stayed in Houston, finished college and graduate school here, and married Wes whose family lives in Houston.” Sollenberger then gets up to retrieve a framed picture. “My grandson Jack,” she says. “I’m just thrilled when he tells my daughter he wants to go to Nana’s house!”

She smiles when she displays a message received during the middle of the workday that Jack “wants to talk to his Nana.”

Sollenberger’s husband, Kent, is a painter with his own art studio in the West University area. They are also the parents of twin boys – Blake who will sit for his CPA exam and then begin working for an accounting firm in Madison, Wisconsin, and Brad who is following his mother’s footsteps by entering graduate school this fall for health care administration at the University of Minnesota.

“I think it’s great Brad is going into healthcare administration,” she says. “We’re facing lots of challenges in healthcare administration, and we need bright, committed kids who want to do this important work.”

What advice does she have for young women seeking executive positions?

“Sometimes women are too reluctant; we think we can’t do something because we don’t have the experience. But, if you’re given the opportunity to do something you think you could do, then volunteer for it!” she exclaims. “Take every opportunity outside the scope of your responsibility. That’s how people can get to know you and recognize your skills. If you really want to move up, you have to be willing to take risks and do things that you have never done before to move to the very next level.”

She concludes, “My mom always taught me this – be nice to everyone you meet. You have to *really* appreciate people and all the contributions they can make to an organization. It isn’t about you. It’s really about the organization and what you and others can do to help the organization be successful.”